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AN

EDITOR OFF THE LINE:

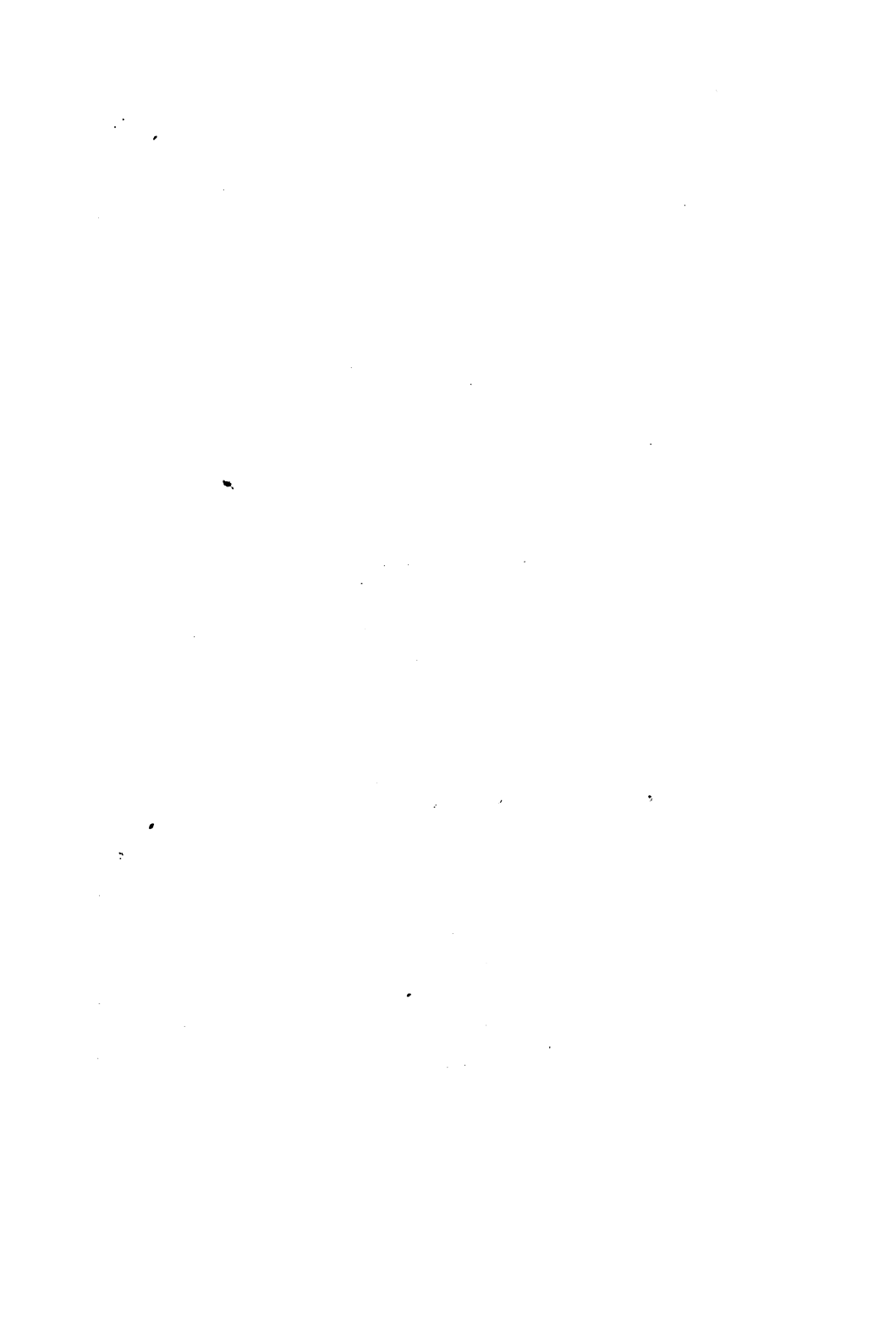
OR

*WAYSIDE MUSINGS AND
, REMINISCENCES.*

BY
EDWARD MIALL.

LONDON: ARTHUR MIALL, 18, BOUVERIE STREET, E.C.

1865.



INSCRIBED,

WITH HEARTIEST LOVE,

TO

MY WIFE

AND CHILDREN.



P R E F A C E.

A FRIEND of mine, on reading the advertisement announcing this volume, exclaimed, ““ *An Editor off the Line*’ ! I hope he won’t come to grief.” I suppose I need hardly respond, “ I hope the same thing,” particularly as I am happy in being able to say that no accident has happened to the train which he stately drives.

During the last six months, I have had on hand a few odd intervals of leisure—an evening or two weekly, according to circumstances—and was tempted to fill them up with some engagement which would take my thoughts

clean away from controversy, ecclesiastical or political, and set them at liberty to follow their own bent. My special object in doing this was to give my mind just that change of exercise which might relieve it of a too continuous strain upon one set of faculties and feelings, and call into play another. In fact, the bulk of the following pages was written with a view to divert myself by performing what was to me a novel as well as self-imposed task. I frankly confess I contemplated from the first the publication of what I should write ; but that, of itself, was no part, or a very trifling part, of my inducement.

Most of the topics treated of were suggested by ordinary incidents which came under my notice in a daily walk. I have dealt with them just as my mood at the moment might determine—sometimes in a light, sometimes in a serious, and, I fear, some of my readers will judge, sometimes in a

heavy manner. I worked up, if work it can be called, to no preconceived plan. The choice of my subjects, and the way in which I have used them, are alike due, in most instances, to that mental caprice which is not uncommon, at least, as far as I am concerned, when mere intellectual recreation is the object. The slender thread which holds the series of papers together, and gives them the slight connection one with another which they may be found to possess, consists of the fact that, with one or two exceptions, they all have reference to exercise out of doors. Their secondary title truly expresses their character and drift — they are “*wayside musings and reminiscences.*”

I ought to apologize, perhaps, for having made such frequent use of the first personal pronoun. I should have been glad to avoid it if I could have done so without giving to the papers an air of formality quite inconsis-

tent with my general design. Musings and reminiscences cannot very well take an impersonal shape, and, being "off the line," I thought it most fitting to drop the editorial "we." This egotism, I hope, is more in appearance than in reality; for I would not consciously offend against good taste in that direction.

I have already had the largest share of the pleasure which I anticipated when I resolved upon doing what is now done. I shall have no right to complain, very little, perhaps, to be surprised, if they who may honour these pages with perusal find no adequate compensation for their pains. The nervous hesitation with which this little volume is sent forth is that of a man who, having been long accustomed to do one thing in the presence of the public, is induced, no matter by what reason, to do another thing, which, far less formidable in itself, is nevertheless strange to him. It is

no extraordinary occurrence for men who have addressed thousands from the pulpit or the platform without any anxiety as to their reputation, to tremble like a leaf at having to pitch a tune before half a dozen persons. Sailors, whose spirits never quailed in the roughest gales at sea, have been known to pass a sleepless night before mounting a horse. With some such trepidation I offer this collection of papers to the public, very much inclined to feel as the little boy in *Punch's* memorable cartoon may be supposed to have felt when he chalked up "No Popery," and ran away.

I have only to add that four of the papers contained in this volume have appeared, though in a somewhat different shape, in the journal I have the honour to edit.

E. M.

Welland House, Forest Hill, S.E.

April 3, 1865.

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I.

A, "CONSTITUTIONAL."

I QUESTION whether any kind of daily exercise for the body is to be preferred to a walk. It is not to be denied that there are other kinds more stimulating, more pleasurable, more likely to be recommended by medical men to dyspeptic patients—horse exercise, for example, or, where it can conveniently be had, rowing—but they bear some such relation to a daily "constitutional" as spiced cakes do to bread. They are exceptional to most people, and, because exceptional, better as an alternative than a part of the every-day routine of life. There are times in the course of the ordinary career of most men, or states of bodily health, or special demands enforced by special circumstances, which give to some other mode of exercise a temporary superiority over walking, in regard not only to the recovery or maintenance of health as a result, but also to enjoyment in the process; but for satisfying the daily craving of our physical nature for a fair allowance of pleasant exertion, walking carries off the palm. If I were put to the necessity of choosing whether I would spend an hour or two every day of my life in any one particular exercise—walking, riding, row-

ing, gymnastics, cricket, bowls, or what not—I should certainly elect the first. The sameness of it would be less tiring than the sameness of any other mode of recreating bodily vigour. At first, indeed, it exhibits fewer attractions, but it *wears* better.

I enjoy a walk, with or without companions. In earlier life, when as yet the prospect of acquiring even a moderate rotundity of figure was far more like a fanciful dream than a distant reality, and was reckoned among the possibilities of the future of which the odds against their becoming facts appeared too many to admit of calculation, I could walk from morning to night without an approach to distress. I liked it then, partly because it gave me change without trouble, partly because my customary pursuits were sedentary, partly because no other mode of exercise was open to me. I like it now for different reasons. But there has been an interval in my life—a rather wide one—throughout which, owing to the pressure of sterner engagements, and to the creeping over me of an insidious indifference to active exertion, my walks were determined solely by the exigence of business. They put me in motion, it is true—they exercised my muscles and quickened the circulation of my blood—but they did not answer the purpose of recreation. They were not such as pass by the name of "constitutionals." It cannot be denied that walks forced upon one by necessity have their uses, but they will bear no comparison with walks of choice. No one who has been fortunate enough to be able to

substitute the latter for the former will contest this. To derive from a walk all the enjoyment—exquisite enjoyment at times—it is capable of giving, it must be a walk "with a will." The exercise is as a maiden who discloses her charms very sparingly to those who merely put up with her for the sake of something besides or beyond herself, but flashes unanticipated delights into the bosom of a spontaneous and hearty wooer.

Some people contend that when a man is taking his "constitutional," he will do wisely to let himself subside, as entirely as his nature will admit of, into a mere animal, to keep his senses wide open to the entrance of every emanation from natural objects, and to close all the outlets to intellectual thought. There is a *substratum* of truth in the idea, but it is greatly exaggerated. If a man's thinking during his walks continue to run in the ruts of his daily business—be it what it may—if it remain upon the beaten, dusty, too familiar road of his ordinary occupation, if it plod wearily toward the same goal instead of frisking hither and thither over any fields or into any by-ways that invite it, the more effectually he can shut the door on his thinking the better. More than half the benefit of a walk results from shifting the burden of thought. Whether the brain, as a piece of mechanism, has its distinct and separate joints, upon one or more of which certain operations of the mind put an exclusive strain, and which, unless periodically thrown out of gear, get the sooner out of repair, is a question for physiologists to determine. As a matter of

fact, it is undeniable, that change of thought is as indispensable for the brain as change of diet for the stomach, and that in such change it finds rest. They who are unable, during an hour or two's walk, to put a stop to the grinding process to which through the greater number of their waking hours they compel their thinking faculty, who hardly consent to relieve it from the collar, and to let it exchange its mill-horse round for a quiet graze or a frolicsome scamper, should find a companion, if possible, lively, talkative, harum-scarum. Especially is this to be desired if, in place of being given to pursue the same line of thinking, some carking care preys upon the spirits. Brooding is a terribly exhaustive habit. There is nothing like it for wasting the vital powers. If, therefore, the suggestion with which this paragraph opens were meant to have reference to either of the cases glanced at in the succeeding remarks, it has in it a colour of truth.

It is true, for instance, that if you would take your "constitutional" with a relish, your organs of sense should be kept on the alert, and your mind attentive, for a time at least, to their reports. The Frenchman's entreaty to his friend at table that he would hold his tongue, and not by incessant talking rob him of his enjoyment of dinner, was reasonable enough. It is not the scent of fresh earth or of wild flowers, of wood smoke from the cottage chimney, or of the hay-stack out of which brown blocks of dry toast are being cut for the farmer's horses—it is not the sight of green

meadows, or golden knolls, or purple heath, or blue mountain—it is not the sound of singing birds, or of the tinkling sheep-bell on the hill-side, or of the gurgling and splashing of the brooklet at its foot, or of the hum of insects, or of the distant cock-crow, or lowing of kine, or barking of dogs—it is not even the glow of skin and thrill of nerve which a clear sky, a gentle breeze, and a frosty atmosphere produce—it is none of these nor of the like which of itself does one good in his morning or noontide walk; his elasticity is repaired rather by the notice which his mind takes of the impressions made by outward objects upon his senses. I have walked occasionally through the most delicious country with a companion whose thoughts were preoccupied by some literary project, and have felt that he might just as well have exchanged places with a sentry tramping to and fro in front of a prison gate. He heeded nothing external to himself; he seldom took his eyes off the glaring chalk-stone road along which he trudged with down-turned gaze and absent mind; he scarcely heard any remark unless it related to the subject which, for the time being, alone had power to interest him. What was the use of a "*constitutional*" to him? And if the mere bodily exercise of a walk was beneficial to him, why might he not have taken it in his own yard, and not have troubled himself to make his excursions to spots famed for their witchery over the imagination? Poor fellow! habit developed into disease, and the concentration of his thinking powers was so rarely relaxed,

that the time came when he could not relax it if he would.

Still one does not like to believe in the necessity of sinking into pure animalism in his walks, or of giving exclusive attention to objects of sense, charming as they may be. Allow that you may profitably set out with all your senses keen and eager, and without any recognised intellectual purpose, it does not follow as a matter of course that the spontaneous movements of your mind along a line of thought suggested by some object before you, or by an association of ideas with it, may not contribute, as much as the walk itself, to your recreation. Let but the line over which the thinking faculty travels be a fresh one, and the motion of the thoughts natural and unconstrained—determined by attractions of affinity, and not by the authority of the will—a sort of intellectual stroll rather than a march—and the result will be re-invigoration, not exhaustion.

The main pleasure of a "constitutional," and, therefore, the chief benefit, to men whose occupation makes a continuous demand upon their brains, or whose circumstances keep in play one set of emotions, will be found to consist in this roving at discretion of their inner selves over unfamiliar ground. The gentle surprises which stir them as they discover the points at which separate paths of thought run into one another, and the distant but visible conclusions whither they tend—the slumbering susceptibilities which are one after another awakened—the new sentiments which are evoked—the *easy, self-moving* way in which the mind skims over

a novel district of speculation, lingering and fluttering over this feature, darting off at a tangent for some other which is remotely related to it, nestling down upon some spot of beauty in purest enjoyment, and then soaring heavenwards, as the lark, to pour out its overflow of emotion—herein lie the fascinations and glory of walking over other modes of daily exercise. The intellect and the heart get an airing as well as the body. There are times in the experience of most thoughtful people when, jaded by a too-lengthened and engrossing pursuit of the special business of their lives, or thrown off their balance by some sudden disappointment, a short pedestrian excursion through a picturesque neighbourhood almost magically revives their spirits. All the pores of their mental and moral nature open to imbibe the genial atmosphere through which they move, and the sense of beauty, like a summer shower upon an arid soil, sinks into them, and permeates them with its restorative energy. Their thoughts are not consciously active during the delicious process. Their minds are simply receptive. It is as though they were bathed in the loveliness of the scenes that surround them, and all the hidden springs of their vitality fill up until they overtop the brim.

It may be a mere fancy, but I cannot help thinking that the measured motion of the feet in walking prompts the thoughts to come forth, and, as it were, dance to the beat of time, arrange themselves symmetrically, and place or move themselves in more graceful figures and more artistic groups than at other times. One catches oc-

casional bursts of ideal harmony which, if not suggested by, accommodate themselves to, the regular footfall of the pedestrian. Did a notion of this kind conduce to the formation of the ancient peripatetic school? Depend upon it there is something in it. At any rate, men may usefully avail themselves of habit for the government of their intellectual activities, and train them to obey even artificial laws of association.

The full benefit of a "constitutional," however, can be realized only by those who take it daily. With suitable toggery one may safely, with very rare exceptions, be regardless of weather. Indeed, the zest of a daily walk is heightened by meteoric changes. A man is but a stranger to Nature who does not observe and converse with her in all her moods. It is by looking into her face steadily, and by studying all her varieties of expression, that we get to be on a sufficiently familiar footing with her to read her meaning, and commune with her at our will. An occasional walk is undoubtedly better than no walk at all; but the practice loses more than half its charm when it is fitful and intermittent. Of course, a regular walk presupposes tolerably sound health; but, where considerations of health do not preclude it, regularity is the soul of walking. And regularity, in this case, helps to dispel rather than to favour monotony. Walking may be a dull exercise to those who but unfrequently resort to it, because the thoughts are unaccustomed to the signal which sets them free. But let a man walk every day, in all weathers, and although he

may be obliged always to take the same road, his mind will find or make variety enough of entertainment. There will always be some fresh aspect of the objects about him to suggest new trains of ideas, or to quicken and gratify hitherto unnoticed susceptibilities.

There are some—young people more particularly—who like to connect their "constitutional" with a special pursuit, such as fern-hunting, botanising, the study of form and colour in their relations to artistic effects. There is much to be said in favour of this practice, but it is open to question whether, considered in the light of recreation, it answers all the purpose of letting your thoughts stray as they list. Much depends, of course, on previous training, something on personal idiosyncrasy and peculiarity of position. I happen to prefer the last method, because it affords me most enjoyment. I revel in the liberty which it leaves to my mind. In the intervals of release from *bonâ fide* work, and especially when taking exercise, as I mostly do, alone, musing is a pleasant change to me—castle-building it occasionally runs into—but generally it is nothing more than such speculation, dissociated from effort, as the objects which pass under my notice may chance to start. A few of the thoughts thus suggested and followed up I venture to offer for the entertainment of my readers, not daring to hope more than that they may furnish pastime in odd seasons of leisure, and impart to others a small share of that recreative enjoyment which they yielded to me.



II.

DRIZZLE.

THE crucial test of daily walking is drizzle. Downright rain evokes a spirit of antagonism which, in its way, and for awhile, it is rather agreeable than otherwise to feel yourself called upon to express. When you have something to wrestle with, it is a satisfaction to be able to lay hold of it, and to be conscious that a serious effort to get the better of it, and lay it at your feet, is worth your while. Where the annoyance is sufficiently serious to justify you in putting your mouth to the trumpet, and formally summoning your powers of endurance to the contest, you are repaid, partially at least, by the excitement of the moment. A real battle with the elements, in which the will, the commander-in-chief of the internal forces, is put upon its mettle, is an affair which wakes up from sleep the drowsier representatives of the life within you, and makes them conscious of the enjoyment of fitting exercise. On the other hand, when the weather invites your confidence rather than challenges your endurance, and the tenderer and more delicate sympathies come fearlessly out for sport, while the will takes its rest, you are conscious of a sort of holiday

pleasure, as refreshing to the mind as the silent dew is to vegetation. But drizzle is neither one thing nor the other. It embarrasses you. You know not how to treat it. You hoist your umbrella, and are ashamed of yourself; you put it down, and encounter a watery invasion which, despicable as it seems, makes havoc of your comfort. Drizzle is a scarcely visible, insinuating, penetrating, all-pervasive foe. It does not rouse you, but insensibly steals away your vital warmth. It teases you like a guerrilla force hovering upon the skirts of an army, or like a pestilent swarm of flies in autumn, which follow you up in your walk, and take turns to pitch on your nose, and to wear out your patience by an uninterrupted succession of small attacks. You don't like to trouble your manhood with so insignificant an affair—it seems too contemptible; but the infliction, ignoble as it is, worries you. It is past a joke, but not quite up to a trouble. It is dull, with nothing whatever to redeem its dulness. It tries your endurance, without stirring your motives to endure.

Drizzle not only spoils you, but spoils everything about you. It blurs the landscape, mystifying its outlines, and smudging its colours. It seems to damp the life out of every living thing. Dogs lose their springiness and droop their tails. Fowls mope about under such shelter as they may conveniently get at, and ruffle their feathers, and turn their eyes, and croak out every now and then a guttural complaint, as if the world were simply wearisome and disgusting. In the meadows on

each side of your road, horses and cattle either graze as though they were obeying a stern sense of duty, or stand listlessly about as if they had given up both duty and pleasure as a bad job. The hedge-rows look wet and depressed. The trees that overhang your path—none others are visible, or, if visible, attract your notice—have lost their sprightliness, and look at you, as you pass them, with a dispirited vacancy of expression. The butcher's boy dashes by you in his cart, but, contrary to his usual habit, looks nowhere, and has not enough superfluous life in him to get up a whistle. Nature sulks. You can face her frown, you can welcome her smile, but her sullenness beats you. In fact, you are sullen too, and perhaps nature *seems* so, because you yourself *are* so. You go out without expectation, you come home without the faintest flush of self-complacency. Your pride has dragged, and, as nothing in particular has challenged you, you feel yourself justified in turning up your nose at things in general.

There's my old friend Q——, usually as vivacious as if his veins ran quicksilver—an elderly man, it is true, but small, slim, wiry, and possessed of a greater stock of energy than he can expend upon his daily duties, and who lets off the surplus in fidgety movements, little jets of laughter, jerky but significant gesticulations, and a wonderful succession of pleasing rigmarole, done up in small parcels to give away to his acquaintances. I have met him out when the wind "blew great guns," and driving snow pelted his mottled face most ruthlessly,

and, as he struggled by me in resolute contention with the storm, he would fire off a salute, the jest or exploding bang of which indicated a full stock of pent-up spirits. The other morning I chanced to overtake him in a drizzle. He moaned a recognition in a limp, dumpy, inanimate tone, as if companionship at such a time were an infliction. "A disagreeable day," I said. "Disagreeable!" he echoed, with a feeble gesture of disgust, "it's perfectly ridiculous." We walked on together a few paces. I made a desperate and unsuccessful attempt at a joke; he took no notice of it. Small drops of concentrated mist were pendulous on his grey whiskers, which, it was evident, annoyed him, but which he cared not to brush off. His life had retreated to some hidden shelter within him, and would not look out. My own elasticity of spirits was at pretty near zero. So, after a few minutes' dogged silence on both sides, I took advantage of a by-way leading off the road, and exhausted the scanty remains of my animation by wishing him "Good morning."

I remember hearing of a minister, a noted one, too, in his day, saying that whenever he felt himself at a loss in the pulpit, he could always fall back upon afflictions. Just so—there is something positive and marked about afflictions, like jagged rocks rising abruptly from the centre of a valley—and they are sure to command attention. Besides, whoever has been shaken by real trouble is prompted, by a sort of irresistible spell, to take every opportunity during the rest of his days of visiting its

grave. But human life, with a remarkable exception or two here and there, is not made up wholly or mainly of successive tragedies. Happily for most of us, our road does not lead us through regions of romance above two or three times between birth and death. Sorrow will always draw to itself sympathy ; suffering seldom lacks support. Dramatists, sonnetteers, essayists, novelists, preachers, are always ready to bind up the broken heart, and soothe its pain with the balmiest comfort they can discover. But the hardest condition of circumstances to bear, or perhaps it should be said the state of our affairs which we endure with least profit and credit, is what may be described as "drizzle."

"You see, sir," was the reply given to a friendly enquiry of a very industrious and respectable artisan as to how he was getting on, "I can't say I'm up, like, and I can't putend that I'm down, like, but I'm mostly bobbing about the line betwixt 'em, wi' my head more under than over, like." That is a good description of the worldly affairs of no end of folk. They are not in deep water, and they are not on *terra firma*. They are getting a living, but they are getting it "by the skin of their teeth." They labour hard to keep their heads above water, and they do manage (often enough to prevent them from sinking to the bottom) to get their mouths above the water line, and draw in a full breath of hope. But then, more usually than not, they dip just a little below the water line, whereby they are put to sore inconvenience, but are exposed to no immediate

danger—a most uncomfortable state, no doubt, to say the least of it, but by no means alarming.

Under the strain of this test our poor imperfect nature discloses its flaws far more readily than when it is subjected to the torture of dire and overwhelming distress. When men stand face to face in the battle of life with an adversity too strong for the strength they are conscious of possessing, they retreat as soon as they can upon their base line, if they have one—pride, principle, or religious faith. They call up their reserves. They throw up entrenchments. They seek available alliances. They sacrifice any or every pleasant thing likely to encumber their action in defence of what seems to be their last position. The very intensity of their excitement enhances the clearness of their perceptions, concentrates their powers of reason, and nerves their will. Or, if convinced of the utter disparity of the resistant force at their command, they look wistfully about them for vantage ground, and seek assistance outside of their own lines, wherever they believe it may be had. But it is quite otherwise when the demand made upon their strength hardly ever rises above ordinary limits. It is the number and persistence of small cares, none of them of sufficient importance to alarm, nor all of them together able to do more than embarrass and impede the onward progress of a man, that do most to bring to light the weak points of his character. He will not gather up his forces to meet a “rabble rout” of scrubby annoyances. Like the knight riding through

the back lanes of a city, who disdains to put his lance in rest against the crowds of bawling children who holloa at and worry him, he deems it beneath the occasion to use the weapons reserved for conflict with nobler foes. But he is seldom in greater danger of losing his self-possession, or of giving way to the infirmities of his nature. While his grander powers stand aloof, his meaner passions are very apt to assert their force, and he who encounters the mere variations of life with the loose and undisciplined levies which bad temper can enlist, must not be astonished above measure if he gets a fall.

And yet, perhaps, in the state of a man's circumstances so aptly typified by drizzle, the probation most common to people in this land mainly consists. As every country has its own distinctive climate, to which the physical constitutions of its inhabitants gradually accommodate themselves, so it seems that every phase of civilisation gives off its own moral atmosphere, by the plastic influence of which the leading features of character are modified. The system under which we live is, for the present, that of unrestricted competition, and for all purposes of individual discipline, we may take that system to be the ordination of Divine Providence. We find ourselves, quite irrespectively of our own choice, set down in the midst of it, and we must somehow or other mould our moral nature under conditions which bring us incessantly into contact with its influences. The disciplinary career of, perhaps, the greater

number of us, takes us through a thick undergrowth of petty cares, trivial vexations, and annoyances that cannot be dignified with the name of troubles. In making our toilsome way through them certain developments of personal character will be the probable result, and national character will show the effect of a vast aggregation of such results. We are far too short-sighted to be able to discern the bearing which this process will have hereafter upon human destiny. We may greatly have preferred being made subject to a very different sort of trial, one better fitted to evoke the higher qualities of our manhood. Are we sure that it would have been best for us? May it not be that the special kind of probation through which we are passing is precisely that best suited to us? Possibly, the training which the special character of the times makes most desirable for us, is just that which will teach us that moral growth depends far more upon the ordinary than upon the extraordinary exercise of our principles, and that "small" and "great" are terms which have no proper relation to the duties of life. Nor, perhaps, is that near balance of good and evil in our affairs which denies us splendid successes, on the one hand, and preserves us from overwhelming calamities on the other, the less suited to us on account of its tendency to bring up distinctly to our self-consciousness the less pleasing qualities and the meaner dispositions which might else lurk unseen in the depths of the soul.

"You seem to have a desperate dislike of drizzle,"

observed a friend. "I don't like it, certainly," was the reply, "Do you?" "I should not choose it," he said, "but I don't mind it. It's a variety, at any rate, and may be made a very tolerable one." "How so?" "Dress for it, man. An umbrella is a mistake as a protection from drizzle. The secret of comfort in walking is to let your equipment be selected with a view to your present need." There is common sense in that. The little worries of every-day life require no heroism in those who would meet and master them. We don't put on a panoply of steel to keep off gnats. But if we would preserve our own equanimity, and prevent our peace of mind from a perpetual succession of irritating inflictions, we must face our tormentors with a preparation of mind really adapted to neutralize their assaults. In other words, we must make a business of it; and when once we come to see that it is a business which becomes us, and therefore has to be done with intelligence and good-will, we shall not be long in finding out the most appropriate means and methods of doing it. In this case, it is useless for one man to prescribe rules to another. Those which answer the purpose most satisfactorily in the experience of A., may be inapplicable to the circumstances or character of B., C., and D.

The best—in fact, we may say the only thoroughly reliable prophylactic against the sulks which a multiplicity and never-ending obtrusion of things that bother you have a tendency to produce, is a motive which is

equally operative on small occasions as on great ones. A man makes no account whatever of drizzle when he is in pursuit of an object dear to his affections, or when he is discharging a responsibility which presses heavily upon his conscience. Who cares for it, who notices it, when, after some considerable absence, he is nearing home, and anticipating the mutual delight which his return will awaken? What on earth does it signify to the man who is bent on an errand of sweet and substantial benevolence to an expectant neighbour? And so with the small cares and grievances of daily life. They make but little impression upon the spirits in the case of such as are pushing through them towards something which pre-occupies their hearts. We measure the importance of external discomforts in an inverse ratio with the intensity of our love. Degrees of comparison show very little difference to those who are in the main indifferent to the things compared, and whose best powers and largest sympathies are otherwise engaged. A full heart is the true secret of a healthful and happy life—a heart kept full from day to day from the inexhaustible spring—a heart beating with love in unintermitting pulsations, and thereby circulating life and vigour throughout one's whole moral being. There is nothing equal to it for excluding worry. 'Tis a bad thing to let vexations be absorbed into the system, and break out, as they inevitably will, in ill-humours. Full of the soundest practical philosophy is the apostolic admonition, "Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication

with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And *the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*"



III.

THE HUMOROUS AND THE GROTESQUE IN NATURE.

A KEEN sense of humor is a real blessing. Laughter, always supposing it to be free, breaking forth from us as water from a spring, and not pumped up like water from a well—laughter, in all its gradations, from the mildest internal chuckle which only dances in the eyes and curves the movable lines of the face, to the explosive guffaw which shakes both the sides—laughter is something to be thankful for. There are some who will vote this to be heresy. Why they should do so, unless their livers are out of order, it is difficult to see. Was it, then, a mistake that man was made “a laughing animal?” Whose arrangement is it that when his innocence is most unspotted he laughs the oftenest and the most joyously? Did anyone ever regret to hear the ring of laughter from his children? Did ever parents, favoured with average moral sanity, forebode evil of their little ones on the ground of their loving laughter? He who made us capable of appreciating beauty, truth, goodness, made us capable also, each in his measure, of being tickled by the ludicrous, implanted in us a sense

to perceive it, and an instinctive readiness to respond to it. If we ought to be grateful for the one, why not for the other? An honest laugh, indeed, is usually and with reason accepted as a sort of earnest that the bosom from which it comes cannot be wholly given up to evil. There must be something wrong either in a man's physical state, or in his theory of morals, or in his theological belief, or in his conscience, if he cannot, at proper times and on fitting occasions, laugh and be thankful.

Whether the inferior animals are open to impressions of the ludicrous, it would, perhaps, be speaking without book to determine. But, beyond all doubt, Nature—to use a well understood metonym that may help us to avoid even seeming irreverence—addresses herself, sparingly, it may be, but yet unmistakably, to this susceptibility of man. No one, surely, who has familiarized himself with her operations over a tolerably wide range, and whose sense of the humorous and the grotesque is in a healthy condition, can have failed to come across traces of her workmanship of which the predominant expression is nearly allied to fun. One meets with specimens of it in almost all her departments. Beasts, birds, fishes, reptiles, insects, clouds, rocks, trees, flowers—you may discover some individual variety of each, distinguished by the characteristic of oddity, quaintness, whimsicality, droll contrariety to what is usual, or playfulness of fantastic combination. Take the monkey tribe, for instance, every family of which

seems to have been moulded to express, either by their forms or their antics, a ludicrous caricature of humanity. Many of our readers may have noticed in the Zoological Gardens at Regent's Park, a little animal of the armadillo species, if our memory do not deceive us, which runs round the four sides of his den with tiresome regularity, and turns head-over-heels at one corner of it, for what earthly purpose except to provoke merriment it would be difficult to divine. A single feather or two turned the opposite way to the rest of its plumage sometimes gives a bird all the semblance of a joke. What a fund of dry humour there is in a magpie! Are there not fishes whose faces it is impossible to look into without being stirred to at least a momentary mirth? Who can help being diverted, at times, by the audacious jollity of a blue-bottle? Or who does not see clouds, now and then, assume shapes which a Leech might have profitably transferred to his note-book—old gnarled trees which grin at the passenger—rocks flung together so as to suggest some comical device—flowers which play tricks with one if he touch them, or wink a grimace at him as he looks upon them? Did ever man commune with Nature without being presented occasionally with a grotesque conceit done up in a concrete form? Much rarer than beauty, than fitness, than artistic elaboration, humour, nevertheless, peeps out upon him unexpectedly, at times, and evokes a response as characteristically correspondent with itself as results from an appeal to any other of his susceptibilities.

Now, why are we to regard all this as the effect of mere chance when our sense of the ludicrous is touched, but of design when our sense of beauty, or our power of appreciating utility, is addressed? What is there in the visible embodiment of a humorous idea which should make us set it down as an accident, unless we are prepared to deal in the same manner with a fragrant smell, a graceful form, or a rich tracery of harmonious colours? Grant, if you will—and it is granting more than facts will warrant—that every singularity the sight or sound of which provokes titillation is but the most fitting means to some more important end, may not the same thing be said, with quite as close an approach to the truth, so far as we know it, of the objects, qualities, or actions which pleasantly affect us in any other way? The song of the lark or the hee-haw of the jackass equally represents a true impulse of the life of the creature from which it proceeds; the one enchants us by its melody, the other elicits merriment by its dissonant oddity. What is there that should induce us to conclude that Nature meant us to be pleased with the one, and did not mean us to be tickled with the other?

Some such thoughts as these occupied me in my daily walk, no long time ago, in consequence of having suddenly caught sight of one of those whimsical freaks of Nature to which allusion has been made. It was an old pollard willow, peering over a bramble hedge, at the right and left of which, at a distance of a few feet from the trunk, a gap had been made by trespassers into the

adjoining meadow—the stunted tree presenting, in connection with the small breadth of hedge it overlooked, a very fair outline of a woman’s head, neck, and shoulders. But what a face it had ! The time of day was a few minutes after noon, and the sun was shining brilliantly. Possibly, much of what was striking in the picture was brought out by the lights and the shadows as they showed themselves at that particular moment. The crown of the pollard was bare, and decay or accident had stripped off a portion of the bark beneath. But the inequalities of surface had ranged themselves into a perfect resemblance of an old crone’s face. One eye was shut as if she was winking fun at you, the other wide open as if to watch the effect. The nose was hooked and warty—the chin, too, was peaked and carbuncled. But the mouth, curved into a broad grin, and drawn up much higher on the side of the closed eye than on the other, positively challenged you to laughter. There was a life-like expression of concentrated humour in the whole face perfectly irresistible. It dissipated, as if by magic, a fit of the blues under which I had previously struggled.

Well, what more did you see, the reader may ask, than an illusion of your own fancy ? Very little indeed ; but then I saw just enough to stimulate my feeling of the ludicrous. Whether what I saw was there for that purpose, is not material to the question. It *was* there. It was apt to the purpose. The sense which it stimulated was no more my own creation than any other of

my senses. I am not discussing the metaphysics of the matter. All I know of it is that, just in like manner as a fragrant odour refreshes me—and Nature has scattered up and down her works objects which exhale a fragrant odour—so a comical idea tends to make me laugh—and I find among natural objects not a few that suggest comical ideas. That suffices for my feelings, however far it may fall short of satisfying my intellect.

Whether our perception of the humorous in Nature be wholly subjective, or, as in the case of other perceptions, partly objective also, it is undeniably pleasant. In our intercourse with our fellows there is nothing, perhaps, that acts so powerfully as a solvent of reserve (unless it be communion in sorrow), as a community of feeling in the humorous, a genuine outburst of which wonderfully removes those barriers against too familiar access which we ordinarily interpose between ourselves and comparative strangers. When men have heartily laughed together they usually become willing to draw closer to one another, and to interchange their thoughts and feelings with a greatly increased freedom. A public speaker who is seeking to cleave his way to the confidence of his audience, can hardly do so more effectively than by making a natural and pertinent jest the pioneer of his more serious declamation, or of his more weighty logic. It brushes away, as scarcely anything else does or can, a host of prejudices. It is a herald whose challenge brings out to the front, in an instant, the more amiable and trusting dispositions of our common nature.

At the sound of it, a thousand minds, it may be, which have assumed something like an attitude of wariness, if not of defence, lay down these weapons of antagonism, and advance without hesitation to a parley. It almost miraculously abridges the distance between the orator and his hearers. Not altogether unlike this is the effect wrought upon us by the humorous or the grotesque in Nature. *The* mind which looks through her handiwork into ours and invites intercourse, thus chases away, for the time being, our consciousness of the immeasurable interval between the one and the other. It approaches us on that side of our nature which is not only easily accessible from without, but which also has an open communication to much that is within. The influence which finds an entrance into us by that gate is less suspiciously watched, and is suffered to come more freely into contact with our inner and more jealously secluded feelings. And when it has come by that inlet, and bespoken and gained a measure of our confidence, it encounters fewer hindrances to its access to us by other ways; for we are none the less, but much the more, inclined to heed the serious teachings of Nature when we have been surprised into oneness with her by her address to our sense of humour.

It ought always to be borne in mind that men's minds are many-sided, and require to be touched on every side in order to elicit perfect confidence. A man who can only laugh with us may have but little hold upon us, whether for good or evil; but even the man who is

one with us in most other, and in the most important, respects, is not all that he might be to us if he *cannot* laugh with us. There will always remain in us, so far as *he* is concerned, a disused possibility of his getting closer. Now, it is no trivial advantage to be assured that there is no side of our being that Nature, by means of her works, is unable to touch—no sense for the gratifying of which she has not made provision in proportion to its importance—no inborn susceptibility without its fitting objects. Laughter is not the business of life, but only a healthful recreation of it. The food for it, or stimulants to it, in what is purely natural, may not be, because they need not be, abundant—but, although scanty, they are sufficient. We gain nothing, we lose rather, by shutting our eyes to the completeness in every particular of the outer world to the inner one. We lose in the intimacy and trustfulness of our love. We need never fear that He who has seen fit to endow us with this or the other sense, compromises His dignity by furnishing the material for its enjoyment. He knows far better than we can what beseems His dignity; and since He has created in us a taste for the humorous, we need not be surprised that He has here and there addressed Himself to that taste. We cannot limit His working, or the modes of it, by our narrow-mindedness, nor abolish any part of our nature or the provision made for it, with either advantage to ourselves or honour to Him.

Our reasoning may advance a step further. The

ludicrous in Nature is not merely pleasant, but profitable. It has a medicinal efficacy. It breaks in upon the congregation of blue devils, and puts them to the rout. It cleanses the bosom of stuff which is disintegrating and destructive, and thereby clears the ground for whatever restorative and reproductive energy a man may have in him. When he has been provoked into laughter by that which is indisputably above him, his spirit is drawn, quite irrespectively of his own choice, into closer familiarity with that which is independent of mood, time, place, and circumstance. To the full extent of his sympathy with Nature, he gets extricated from the conventional and the untrue. It is a breath of pure air to him in a close and narrow chamber. It infuses into him fresh life with which to resist the depressive, and therefore demoralizing, influences which surround him. For low spirits are not only an affliction—they breed vice and crime. They may be regarded as the uncleanness of the mind, or the weakness which induces external life to prey upon itself. A hearty laugh is like a good wash—it removes that which is the pabulum of creeping thoughts, while, at the same time, it opens the pores to salubrious influences. The true function of the ludicrous is conservative of moral health. It is not diet—it does not nourish—it puts no meat into a man's soul upon which it can feed—but it is soap and water and a scrubbing-brush to boot—and its effect is to cleanse the susceptibilities, and lay them bare to the better agencies.

30 *The Humorous and the Grotesque in Nature.*

We conclude, therefore, where we began. Laughter is a real blessing. Such provision as we find for it in Nature, we may well accept with thankfulness. If she has so ordered her works that some of them tickle us, we may be sure that her ordination is in harmony with our wants. The fancied wisdom that contradicts hers is folly. When she is humorous, it needs not that we demurely shut our eyes as though we were ashamed of her. Let us look and laugh, and in our laughter let us give thanks. The prudery which sniggles and exclaims "fie," is born of conventionalism. A true response to Nature, where the higher laws of morality and religion do not prohibit it, is what no man need blush for, and invariably does him good.



IV.

OLD BOYS.

THE morning was of that gentle, pure, balmy, I may, without exaggeration, say, affectionate character, that on first going out into the open air one felt obliged to exclaim, "How delicious!" It was October. A deep blue sky without a fleece of cloud to fleck it overhung the earth. The air was crystal clear. The trees, stripped of more than half their leaves, showed a delicate fret-work of twigs traced out with wonderful distinctness upon the bright expanse above the horizon. Not a breath of wind stirred. The hedge-rows and meadows, although it was well on towards noon, were still glistening with dew. The temperature, however, had no touch of chill in it, but was as genial as on a summer evening. And yet how different! It was beauty in action rather than strength at rest. It wooed you. It twined its arms tenderly about you. It kissed you. It was demonstrative. You could not help recognising its charms, for they seemed to glide into your heart by virtue of their own right, and to take undisputed possession of it.

We set out upon our walk—I and Toby—in that confidential mood towards each other which corresponded with the mood of Nature. He, a little boy not quite seven years of age, felt himself almost a man in importance on being made the sole companion of one who had seen eight times his number of years. He was a small, delicately-made child—all nervous tissue—quick in his perceptions, even already keenly alive to the humorous, sensitive in his feelings, gentle and loving—but, withal, blessed with a fair share of animal spirits. Never did face mirror more correctly than his the workings of the mind. It reflected every passing variation of thought and emotion with extraordinary expressiveness. He could control himself to a very creditable, I think I may say to quite an unusual extent—but his countenance was beyond him—it could conceal nothing. And now he unconsciously assumed an air of self-esteem such as his elders might have put on if honoured with the command of her Majesty to dine at Windsor Castle. He tried at first to keep step with me, but as the ability of his little legs fell far short of his ambition, he quietly gave up the attempt, and trotted by my side.

“It’s a very fine morning for our walk,” he remarked, after having fairly settled himself into a regular pace. “Yes, my boy; how far do you think you can go?” “Oh, I can walk a good way now—not so far as I shall be able to when I am a man, of course; but last birthday, Pa took us all to B—— Hills—you know

where B—— Hills are, don't you?—and I walked all the way there and back.”

“Well, that must have been a treat. I suppose you wish your birthday would come again soon?”

“Yes! I think I shall ask Pa to give me a horse next birthday.”

“A horse! why, what would you do with a horse? How would you keep it?”

“Oh, I should have it in the garden, and be very kind to it, you know; and I should ride about upon it all day—not when it was very tired, because that would be cruel; and Allie, and Polly, and Arthur, should ride sometimes—only it would be *my* horse, you know.”

“But you can't ride, Toby—a little boy like you would tumble off and break his neck.”

“I shan't have one till I'm a little older, of course,” he rejoined, not noticing my objection—“but it's very nice to have one. I had one once.”

“Had what?—a horse? When was that?”

“When we stayed at Mr. S's. house, at W——. He had a white horse, quite gentle, you know—I mean a real, live horse—and he used to let me ride on it—and he told me he would give it me to take home.”

“But you did not bring it home?”

“No; perhaps he was only in fun about that; but he let it be my own when I was there, and I dare say he is keeping it for me till I am a man.”

Poor little, innocent, credulous Toby!—he had begun to found his future plans upon pleasant illusions.

I was interested in his confiding prattle, and it gave a turn to my thoughts. For it struck me that we are all doing very much the same thing as Toby, and that boyhood never properly ceases in the present life. Men, in fact, are "old boys."

The continuity of childhood through life is a subject which had often occupied my attention, but the talk of the bright little fellow who walked at my side suggested so many points of similarity, or rather, of identity, in common experience, between the boy and the man, that I fell to musing upon them, and, during the latter half of our pre-prandial trip, I became, I fear, a rather absent companion.

As boys—for I have no reason to suppose my own case to be exceptional—we look forward to manhood as though it were to be a state totally distinct in kind from that in which we are then placed. We expect the time to come when we shall have passed across a boundary line, on the other side of which we shall become, to all intents and purposes, different selves. We have no suspicion that at five-and-twenty, five-and-thirty, or five-and-forty years of age, we shall be merely older boys than we are at fifteen, with more knowledge, indeed, than we had then, with some change in the nature and number of our cares, but with no such alteration of our inner life as to make it distinctly perceptible to us that we have finally quitted that initiatory stage. We do not then suppose that the boy-nature, if I may so say, will go with us all through our future

career, and make itself so frequently visible to us as to forbid our concluding, at any definite period, that it is wholly a thing of the past. In actual experience, however, all our earlier anticipations die away without fruit. We become men in age long before we detect within ourselves any change which even resembles what we thought manhood would full surely bring with it. It is not *another* chapter of life, as we imagined it would be, but only a continuation of the first chapter. We looked for something in the nature of a metamorphosis, which would be sufficiently marked to compel us to feel that here the boy ended, there the man began ; but nothing of the sort made its appearance. And we go on looking for it to the end of the volume, but it never comes. Up to the last, there clings to us, in spite of every other kind of change, the old feeling that we have not quite got through the introductory section—that the completeness of our manhood is yet a thing of the future—and that, old as we are, we are nevertheless only old *boys*. Nay, so far does this feeling haunt us, that we look at our own face, features, and form, as reflected in the glass, with a sort of vague impression that boyhood is still the radical idea of which they are modified expressions. The boy still remains far more distinctly visible to us in them than we had anticipated—the man, or what we fancied would be the man, is but indefinitely revealed in them. We see maturity and fixity in the *physique* of others—and they, perhaps, see them in us—but self looking at the embodiment of self discerns there

a predominance of what we almost unconsciously identify with the early morning of our days.

The experience I have tried to describe, though, I am afraid, with imperfect success, baulks our expectation, but not always disagreeably so. We do not realize our juvenile fancy, it is true, but then we keep hold of rather pleasant associations—associations, too, which become more and more pleasant to us as we advance in years. If we could but put on once more the leather-peeked cap, the pinafore, the round jacket, and the well-linked corduroys of our school age, and cheat ourselves into a belief that our environment were that of a yet unexhausted term of *bona fide* boyhood, our spirits would be all the freer on account of the closer correspondence between our inward consciousness and our outer circumstances. After awhile, when one has abated the keenness of his expectations, it is more pleasant to be able, in determining his own *status*, to link the adjective “old” with the substantive “boy,” than with the more dignified term which his friends and neighbours would employ. A wee, slim, wiry, active, hard-working Dissenting minister, who retained all his relish of fun at sixty years and upwards of age, once narrated to us, with twinkling glee, how, on one occasion, while walking along the main thoroughfare of a provincial town, a gaunt Scotchman nearly twice his height walked for some considerable distance by his side, and looked down upon him every now and then with evident but not disrespectful curiosity. At last he

broke silence with the question, "Are you a man or a lad?" "A man," replied my friend. "I hope ye'll forgie me," said the northern chiel, "for I mair than half suspekkit ye were a lad." Now this is very much the sort of uncertainty that puzzles most of us when we survey ourselves, and we are a little sceptical of the complete accuracy of the answer given us by facts when we are told, with some emphasis, that we have advanced pretty far into man's estate. Formally and outwardly it may be so; but we carry with us still a dim and dreamy sense that we have not yet overpassed the outskirts of the boy-nature.

The feeling is not an unnatural one. As children, our will is perpetually overruled by authority. We are subject to law. We are not our own masters. Our subjection strikes us as the characteristic defect of our state—as the one disadvantage which manhood will do away with. A boy's notion of coming to man's estate is that of being at last freed from the restraints imposed upon him. "When I am a man," he says, "I will do so and so," as if every conceivable hindrance to his having his own way would then be removed. He looks forward to a period when he will no longer be "under tutors and governors." And that seemingly happy period never arrives. He never realizes the kind of manhood after which he fondly aspired. The authority is changed, but it is authority nevertheless. He is not bound by the same restraints; but other restrictions, not a whit less stringent, have taken their place. His

will is not the autocrat he fancied it would be. He has to ask leave of somebody or something above him as often as ever. If anything, he finds himself less at liberty, as he advances in life, to do as he pleases, than ever he did. There are always persons, or events, or obligations, to say "No" to him, when his own preference would fain have them say "Yes." It is just the same thing over again, changed only in form, not in character. He is but an old boy, after all, with very little more power, oftentimes with less, to command his in-goings and out-comings, his whereabouts, his associates, his pursuits, his recreations, than when he went to school. It is not the new experience which he had eagerly anticipated, but a continuance of the old. No wonder that he yet feels himself immature, nor that his manhood should seem to be ahead of him.

Then again, it has to be considered that the spirit of boys is principally nourished on hope. What they have they soon undervalue. What they have not, but wish to have, is to be within easy reach of them when they grow up to men. Life will be a grander thing to them then, and all their childish air-castles and young day-dreams will assume solidity and substantiality. The brightest visions are not regarded as unreal, but only distant. Time will bring them nearer, and wistful longings will gradually condense into fruition. Well, the boy in this sense never ceases to be a boy. The best things—the things that we think we should value most—are always future. At any and every stage of



life, we are still, and consciously, boys in this, that our desires perpetually distance our possessions. We never seem to have got beyond the region of anticipation which, from the first, we always included in our notion of boyhood. Hence, we can hardly persuade ourselves that we entered long since upon the sphere distinguished as that appropriated to men. The main features of the one district are also the main features of the other. It is only by force of reasoning, not of feeling, that we can convince ourselves that we have passed from the one to the other. To our own consciousness, save when it is wakened up by contradictory facts, we have not yet got beyond the boundary we had supposed to separate the boy's from the man's estate.

There is yet another consideration which helps to account for the illusion. Manhood, in a boy's eyes, is a complete thing. It is not a something growing into a something else—it is all that it will be. The edifice is finished. The scaffolding is removed. The rooms are all furnished. The inhabitant is settled. To be a man is to have done growing, have done learning, have done polishing the manners, moulding the character, shaping the dispositions, habits, and conduct. But, unfortunately, life never reaches this perfect development. Quite late on in our experience the incompleteness lasts. To our own apprehensions and feelings, we are no more what we are to be, and may be, than we were in our childish days. We are, of course, riper than we were, but a sense of our unripeness is borne in upon us

even more forcibly than before. Nothing has been put out of hand as finished—or, at any rate, we have as much as ever waiting completion. In this respect we are always boys—rather old boys, some of us, unquestionably. We are not men even yet in the full meaning which we were wont to attach to the *status*. There remains a deal of unsettledness to reduce to order.

But if this continuity of childhood through life is in one aspect of it disappointing, it is in others inspiring. It still points to a more glorious future. We feel that, after having made considerable progress, we are but as yet in the boyhood of our existence. We have not yet reached our maturity. It is before us now as it used to be years ago. Our horizon expands as we advance. Our case is but one of hope deferred, not of hope extinguished. Not wholly even of hope deferred, for we have realized some of our ideals. We are boys still, but we are older boys. We have entered upon some of the privileges of manhood, and hold them as an earnest of what is to follow. Perhaps we have advanced too far to admit of our supposing that the entire change we had looked forward to will be accomplished in us on the hither side of the river which divides the seen from the unseen ; but we are not the less convinced that the completeness of our manhood is in reserve for us. It was while contrasting this present with that future that the Apostle said, “When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child ; but when I became a man I put away childish things.” The

sense of immaturity, therefore, is not destined to be our everlasting inheritance. We went forth from the nursery into the world, and found it only a larger nursery ; but we have another boundary line to overstep, beyond which the yearnings of our nature will be more amply provided for. And as it is now, so will it be then. "The boy's the father of the man." Whatever is now best in us, is but the germination of seed sown in us in our childhood, and still and for ever it will be true that "what a man soweth, that also shall he reap." Unless we have belied all the conditions of our own being, our aspirations all point forward. The impulse within us is not a delusion. We are but boys yet—old boys it may be—but we shall be men some day.

Little Toby and I walked home—he, undisturbed in his faith, and I, differing from him only in this, that the future in which I believed was some steps in advance of his. He will not get his horse, but perhaps he will come into possession of something better suited to him. I may be far out in my guesses as to what is before me, but, peradventure, although it may be quite different from, it may be vastly superior to, my present imaginings. I felt that there was no immeasurable distance between us. The distinction was rather one of degree than of kind. The one was a young boy, the other was an old one. In most other respects, we were essentially alike.



V.

AFTER THE RAIN.

DRIP—drip—drip. I heard it on the window-sill long before dawn, and settled to sleep again, with a comforting, compensatory notion that it could not much signify, in such weather, at what hour a man left his bed. Of course the moment came at last beyond which it would not have been decent to protract the morning snooze, and, with a rather self-satisfied sense of virtue struggling manfully with difficulties, I turned out. The blinds were down—the room was glum with dusky light—but I knew very well the dirty kind of weather I was doomed to look out upon. Nevertheless, most people like, when they can, to interpose between themselves and an unpleasant certainty any little shred of hope within reach. I must confess to having given way to this propensity. There stood on the chamber mantelpiece a meteorological toy for telling the weather, and it *does* tell it with surprising accuracy—that is to say, if there has been no very recent change, it tells you what the weather *is* and *was* with a trustworthiness upon which you may fully depend, and I verily believe it

would tell with equal correctness what it *will be*, but that, as a rule, it gives warning about a day behind time. It is a neat cottage, with two doors, out of which issues, when it has been wet for some hours, a little old man, with a blue great-coat, and, when it has been dry for about the same time, a little old woman, with a smart cap, and a low yellow dress. On consulting this ingenious barometer, I found that the gentleman had pretty well made up his mind that rain might be expected — a conclusion which, considering that it had poured hard all night, I took to be safe and justifiable. I drew up the blind in despair, and looked out. The window-panes were streaming, the eaves of the houses opposite were guttering, the road was sloppy, and every umbrella that was borne past was super-saturated. In fact the downfall was steady, copious, resolute. "A thorough wet day," I muttered, and turned, with an air of resignation, to the business of ablution and the toilet.

Another look-out after breakfast, with no better promise. The darkness of the morning shows that the fleecy veil which intercepts the light of the sun must be unusually thick, and the surface of the clouds turned towards the earth is black and uneven, torn into patches by the now driving gusts. Two or three birds on the lawn, unable, it may be supposed, to postpone their engagements, look woefully bedabbled, and shake their feathers with an air of desperate resolution, as those who would be "jolly under creditable circumstances." The

chrysanthemums and pompons, the only flowers left us with the exception of a late-blooming rose or two, bend their drenched and dishevelled heads, and swing to and fro in the wind, as if overwhelmed by a sudden affliction. The shrubs stand the pitiless pelting with less show of concern, but seem morose and disconcerted. Small rivulets rush down the sides of the gravel walks. Everything is dripping. The vane on the summer-house turns backwards and forwards, occasionally swinging right round, having clearly lost its presence of mind. The wind, however, as one may see by the drift of the clouds, is south, with a point of east in it. Perhaps, after all, it may clear up, before the short day has run out its course. At any rate, one may as well take his chance of it, and put off the walk to a later hour. So, away up-stairs to the warm study, and, in quiet converse with some mind of a past generation, be thankful to forget awhile the weather outside. Indoors, and so occupied, the deluge may be forgotten, save for the hiss and sputter, now and then, of the few drops of rain that find their way down the chimney upon the glowing fire.

Noon—no sign of change. Shall the walk be given up? It looks like sheer folly to go out on such a day, if you are free to stay at home. On the other hand, it is decidedly unpleasant to confess yourself beaten. My resolution veers round after the fashion of the vane. Yes, I will give in. Look at that black mass of cloud that comes heaving itself over the brow of the hill, making even midday dusk and gloomy! I must back again to

my books, and put up with the conclusion of the man who, when found, on such a day as this, standing stock still and wet to the skin in the road on Salisbury Plain, and asked why in the world he stood there, replied, "Why, 'tisn't a day for *going* anywhere, is it?" But stay, there is a gleam of light rising up beneath that huge cloud—the first break I have seen since I got up in the morning. It spreads rapidly, and becomes brighter every minute. The dark monster is rolling away to the left, and in its place, but far higher up in the heavens, one sees a glistening, filmy expanse of white, through the thinnest parts of which the blue sky can be faintly discerned. My former decision is reversed. The overcoat is taken down from its peg in the hall—the thick-soled boots are substituted for slippers—the leggings are buttoned on—the bad-weather hat rammed on to my head—and, umbrella in hand, I sally forth, with mounting animal spirits. I have not gone many steps before the rain ceases—not half-a-mile before the sun shines out, and the western half of the sky is clear, pale blue.

What a peculiarly soft, languishing picture stretches out before me! The foreground is simply a country road, flanked by meadows, and bordered by old elms on the one side, and birches and mountain ashes, in twos and threes, at intervals, on the other; but the road, every wheel-mark along which is distinctly visible, and brimming with wet, gleams with the sunlight which falls upon it, and, heightened by contrast, the bright

green of the fields through which it curved its way, appears more vividly green than I have ever before noticed it. On my right hand, as I advance along the raised pathway edged with pearl-strung grass, the scene is closed in, at a distance of not more than a few hundred yards, by a belt of trees ; but on my left, over the low hedge, I command a broad range of landscape extending several miles. A December sun, even at one o'clock in the day, is low down in the heavens, and its rays not very far from horizontal, and just now, since the rain has passed away, the atmosphere, although nearly free from haze, holds in solution a large amount of moisture, and divests the beams of light which traverse it of their dazzling glare. Accordingly, the scattered villas from two to four miles off, and the limewashed gable-ends of the nearer cottages, fronting the west, are bathed with mellow radiance, and stand out from their own deep shadows and the sombre background with striking distinctness, bright but chastened in their aspect, conspicuous but modest. The hills on the horizon are so gauzy that they seem unreal ; but the subdued light they give back deliciously harmonises with the rest of the scene. It is a picture symbolic of sober joy and grateful rest. The wind, too, is down, the air soft and balmy, and the sunshine is still capable of making itself felt. I soon determine to extend my walk far beyond its usual limits, and allow the tranquil spirit of the scene to penetrate and saturate my own.

The afternoon of life, after a dark and stormy

morning, sometimes, perhaps oftener than we think, resembles this. My dear old friend C——! how the recollection of him rises up in my mind with these external influences about me! I did not know him in his early manhood, and he had got beyond his prime before the first break of light upon his troubled experience. He woke to this mortal life in the very depths of the gloom which, long before he was born, had settled down upon his family. His childhood was one of neglect and privation, for the improvidence and sin of a foregone generation had entailed upon it a heavy judgment. He could look back upon but very few spots of transient brightness, even in the days of his innocence, hope, and exuberance of animal spirits. For a little while, indeed, he shared with a delicate, self-sacrificing, and noble-hearted mother, a burden of care too heavy for his years; but she yielded to its pressure, and he was left to bear it alone. Under its crushing weight he entered the lists of life, to do battle for a position that might at least be tolerable. Everything went against him. "The stars in their courses fought against Sisera." No enterprise of his succeeded. Neither indomitable industry, nor unsullied personal integrity, placed in his hands their customary rewards. He used to believe that a shadow of a curse had fallen upon him, and he had all but given up expecting that he should ever emerge into the light. So he went on, year after year, wrestling manfully, but without much hope, against his adverse circumstances until he had

turned forty. Then, quite unexpectedly, Fortune smiled upon him, and, in a wonderfully short time, he was a rich man. There are some characters, braced up and solidified by a long frost of adversity, which melt away in the summertide of success. There are others which misfortunes roughen and harden, but never ripen, to which prosperity imparts delicious mellowness. C——'s character was of the last kind. As his sky grew brighter, his tenderer sympathies, revived from torpor, came out, and threw a charm of sweetness over his rugged manhood, and the tense will by which he had almost fiercely grappled with the severity of his trials, relaxed into a touchingly thoughtful kindness and beneficence. The afternoon light brought out with charming softness and chasteness the features of his nature, which the down-pour of his cares and griefs had obscured, and the energy with which he had been wont to contend with a threatening fate, subsided into the calm repose of satisfied strength.

Human experience, perhaps, seldom or never displays itself in a more loveable result than in the case of a tranquil, sunny afternoon and evening of life, after a stormy morning. Where the usual period of maturity has been passed before it bursts into flower, there is something extremely fascinating in the chastened gaiety of its bloom. One can sympathise with enjoyment whenever and in whatever aspect it shows itself; but never so fully and gratefully as when it lights up the close of a long troubled career.

There is a reason for this in the peculiar character of the joyousness thus expressed, as well as in the moral associations with which it is regarded.

The happiness of childhood is bewitching—the enthusiastic delight of youth hardly less so. The man who cannot enter into either or both is to be pitied. And yet there is an element in both that gives to the experienced and the thoughtful a touch of heartache. They resemble the beautiful song of the bird whose eyes have been put out. The gaiety is but a blind gaiety after all. It has no notion of what is before and around it. *You* know that it will be transient—*they* who display it do not—or if they assent to it as an undeniable proposition, they cannot realize it as a fact. It is wisely ordered that it should be so—it is best for them, and best for those who love them. Still, the certainty which others may possess that these all-but-unshaded joys will presently give place to a sense of satiety, disappointment, and weariness, or to an in-coming crowd of corroding cares, or to a sudden thunderstorm of affliction, or, possibly, to misfortunes of a kind that bring with them shame or remorse, tempers their sympathy, and sensibly lowers the tone of their pleasurable excitement, as they contemplate what in itself is so well calculated to minister gratification to their hearts. But they who have spent the whole forenoon of their days in conflict, and have already drunk a full cup of sorrows, who have sounded the depths of adversity, and have become familiar with the sterner realities of life,

may be expected to entertain good fortune with a reserved complacency, and a sober estimate of its promises and its powers of performance. We suffer no abatement of the satisfaction with which we witness their success, because we have reason to believe that it is consistent with a larger and truer view of things than is possible to inexperience. The sunshine is not so garish as in the case of the young. It reaches those upon whom it falls through a chastening atmosphere, and we gaze upon it with less disposition to prognosticate the unanticipated changes to which ignorance of life is exposed.

There is yet another element in this kind of calm enjoyment which commends it powerfully to our sympathy. It has less of egotism in it—more of geniality. It is readier to share with others. It has learnt the unutterable worth of genuine kindness, and knows when, where, and how to display it. There are great differences, of course, in this respect, corresponding pretty closely with the different kinds and objects of conflict through which men have passed. Yet it will be seldom found that the early prosperous are so thoroughly accessible on the emotional side of their nature, as they who have reached prosperity at a later period and after many struggles. Liberal they may be—nay, lavish—but not often large-hearted. It requires that a man should himself buffet the strong billows of adversity to enter heart and soul into the feelings and wants of those who are still left tossing upon the waves

of fate. And when such a man retains his love for his kind, it is astonishing how soft and soothing, how gentle in tone and winning in manner, his care for others oftentimes shows itself. There is pity in him—and pitifulness, when unfeigned, has a lightness and balminess of touch which of itself acts as an anodyne.

And with this geniality of soul a charitable judgment generally goes hand in hand. Censoriousness is mostly born of a profound ignorance of our own weakness. In things in which we have not ourselves been put to the test, we fancy ourselves strong, and we seldom make allowance for those who, under trial, in these things, have given way. Nobody but one who knows the power of temptation ought to be relentless and harsh in his condemnation of those who have been worsted by it—and he who has the best right to blame, does so, if he must, with most considerateness. Men who have never felt what it is to be in other than prosperous circumstances, and who have not the least idea of the extent to which the worries and straightnesses of life wear down the delicate perceptiveness of the moral sense, are seldom able to make allowances for the shortcomings and offences of those whose lot is one of incessant warfare with threatening evils. They are not able. It is not to be imputed to them in the way of blame, but simply as the want of a capacity. They who have had some of the fresh bloom of their self-complacency rubbed off in their hard and incessant scramble for a bare living, are instinctively aware of this, and seldom give their

confidence to men whose whole existence seems to them to have been but one prolonged summer. They do not, because they cannot. God Himself has touchingly appealed to this characteristic of our common nature, and, to draw out our trust in perfect goodness, has appointed for us a High Priest who, "in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, is able also to succour them that are tempted."

It must be admitted that this ripeness and sweetness of character is not always the effect of the outward change we have described, inasmuch as it presupposes inherent qualities which are as often as not wanting. But where the capabilities of mind and heart are normal, such is the tendency of the process, and in whomsoever, man or woman, it reaches its natural result, the blossoming of character, corresponding, as it mostly does, with the long-deferred brightness of the lot, gives a peculiar fascination to this kind of Indian summer of human experience, and renders it very attractive to our sympathies.

Besides this, however, and apart from it, interesting moral associations lend an additional charm to success in life when it follows a lengthened course of stormy vicissitudes. It is rest to the footsore and weary—and the very idea of rest requires, for a due appreciation of its delicious and life-restoring influences, a long foregoing season of labour and trial. It is as the haven of safety and tranquillity after a voyage of uninterrupted foul weather. It suggests peace—peace after conflict

—peace in the latter days, when it is most longingly desired. To those who have passed the grand climacteric, no condition takes such a powerful hold upon their imagination as rest and peace. In earlier days the soul looks out after success—in later ones it craves repose as the prime of earthly blessings. It may fail to gain it for itself even when it is surrounded by outward circumstances which seem to invite and secure it ; but a lot free from care, and offering all the supposed requisites for quiet enjoyment, is usually associated in the minds of most people who have commenced their descent from the summit of manhood, with their *beau ideal* of happiness on this side the grave.

Perhaps, too, there is another thought which throws over this kind of experience a mellow radiance that distinguishes no other. The day is wearing on to its close. Lengthening shadows indicate the approach of evening. Our thoughts involuntarily look forward to sundown. The soft light upon which we now gaze will soon have ceased to be—at any rate, it comes from the western, not the eastern, quarter of the heavens. True, there may yet arise storms, but we do not anticipate them. A calm in the elements during the remaining interval of probation, how grateful, how suggestive, how well adapted to be turned to account ! And so we borrow from that which is to come sentiments which give a certain richness and dignity to that which is, and blend with the visible somewhat that belongs to the unseen.



VI.

KICKING OVER THE TRACES.

THERE occur to most persons now and then—half a dozen days in the year, perhaps—a coming together of outward and inward stimulants to joyous animation, the effect of which is closely analogous to effervescence. Very pleasant it is, especially when the subject of it may chance to be, or may have the power of putting himself, beyond need of observing conventional restraints. On the rare occasions of finding oneself thus favoured, exercise, in fact, affords a capital vent for the overflow of the animal spirits. A kind of steeple-chase *à pied*, where the nature of the surrounding country will admit of it, particularly if it be accomplished in company with a friend or two like-minded, offers uncommon facilities in aid of throwing off the ever-rising, bubbling, bursting superabundance of hilarity which can find no adequate expression within the circle of the proprieties without making a man ridiculous. Is it quite certain that, in such states of feeling, the most natural, the wisest, and the most profitable form (judged of by the standards bearing the stamp of social etiquette) in

which a man may give utterance to an excess of vitality, is not that of getting out of the way of those who cannot understand him, and making a fool of himself? May it not serve a good purpose sometimes to kick over the traces? If these queries can be truly answered in the affirmative, then, I say, a good walk with a congenial friend right away from the ordinary haunts of men presents the most suitable means and opportunity.

Has the reader—youthful or elderly, no matter which, always supposing him to be blest with sound health—no recollection of having made acquaintance with that effervescent mood to which allusion has been made? No? Well, if there were any form of speech that would do as well as a sudden arching of the eyebrows and a shrug of the shoulders we should be tempted to write it down. Surely he never can have left the sodden or the dusty highway even in his holidays, if he have any, and, after a dip in the sea and a hearty country breakfast, scrambled, with fit companion, to the top of high downs, to thread his way for miles among the furze and over the heather, where, unless by accident, nothing that breathes is seen but small herds of straying cattle, and scattered flocks of browsing sheep, and humming insect tribes, and blithely twittering birds. Perhaps, if he has done so, the weather was ungenial, or, perhaps, something heavy was upon his mind. But if not—if there was no inward cause of depression—if the sky overhead was clear, and the sun bright, and the breeze at that elevation was not strong enough

to be troublesome, he must be strangely constituted if the pure air which he inhaled, and the gloriously open expanse around and above him, and the elasticity of turf or heath upon which he trod, and the sense of vigour which these things waked up in him, did not make his spirits mount higher and higher as the forenoon wore on, until at last they broke away from all control and grew to a rollicking pitch that he would have been fairly ashamed to exhibit before many witnesses. It is mere pedantry to set limits to the amount of nonsense which a man may talk on such occasions, or to criticise by ordinary rules the boyish gamesomeness of gesture and motion in which he may indulge. Granted that his random, desultory, harum-scarum conversation, albeit saturated with good humour, is useless in other respects, and that his efforts at fun are as awkward as the dance of a full-aged cow when she is first turned into a meadow in spring, they may be excused at least, like the gurgling of water from a narrow-mouthed bottle, as giving stuttering and sputtering expression to a rush of vivacity which can find no sufficient outlet. Let them be taken for what they indicate, not appraised for what they are, and it will be admitted that it does one good sometimes to kick over the traces.

No quarrel need be got up against traces, as such. The convenient ordering of social relationship and intercourse renders them necessary. Wherever men come in contact with each other, each, probably, with his own special angle of character, self-restraint is an

imperative duty, and conventional rules are so far valuable that they show everybody beforehand the precise mode and extent of the restrictions he is expected to put upon himself. A thousand people cannot enter a building by the same door at the same moment. In England, indeed, we seem to have a notion that they can, and we form into crowds and shove, and squeeze, and tear each other's clothes, and endanger each other's limbs, and occasionally get fixed in a hopeless jamb, and, after all, waste more time than is in anywise necessary, merely because we have not accustomed ourselves to wear harness on such an occasion and will not suffer ourselves to be put between traces. In France they manage the affair better. Usage has brought every man, woman, and child under discipline in this matter, and, by arranging themselves *en queue*, a thousand persons will enter a theatre or a church in single file, in the course of a few minutes, without having subjected one another to the slightest crush. Mutual forbearance, orderly regulations suggested by experience, customary observances, attention, within reasonable bounds, to fashion, ceremony, etiquette, conducing, as they all do, to the easier movement of the various social currents, are not to be treated as of no account simply because they exact from every one a surrender, in some trifling matters, of individual freedom. The whole is greater than any of its parts, and to the convenience of the whole it is fitting, of course, that the parts should regard themselves as

under law to contribute. Where the well-being of society, therefore, is affected, kicking over the traces deserves the whip, and if it grow into a habit will be sure to bring down a proportionate succession of stinging flicks.

But every man who looks at things and receives impressions from his own individual point of view, will be conscious, at times, of stirrings within him which he feels it impossible wholly to suppress, and yet to which he is quite unable to give an outward form that will accommodate itself to authorized proprieties; and the question will occur to him whether he should strive to force them into grooves in which they can have no independent play, or should look about him for suitable times, places, modes, and conditions for allowing them to put on a suitable embodiment. In other words, there will be occasional crises in the experience of most, when they will have to ask themselves whether a living force that has sprung up within them—they know not whence or how—but cannot express itself by means of generally accepted rules and time-honoured mechanism, is to be kept under, or whether it may not be wiser to let it have way even in defiance and at the expense of what the judgment of society would pronounce to be an indispensable regularity. Our starting-point has been from the lowest form in which the query can ask for a practical solution—that, namely, of an effervescence of animal spirits demanding other outlets than have been provided for them by the

decorous rules of social life. But there are more serious forms in which the phenomenon will show itself, and there are several lights in which the Apostolic injunction may be pondered, "If any man *seemeth* to be wise, let him become a fool, that he may *be* wise."

The code of the world (I use the term in its ordinary not its theological sense) may be taken to represent an average of the ideas afloat in the world at any given time as to what is, in common parlance, "*the thing*" for people to do who care to be reputed sensible and respectable. It may be considered a digest of an immense quantity of materials, many of them coming down to us from past ages, some of them the deposit of recent experience, constituting altogether a fair practical standard by which every man may try the *prima facie* worth of whatever is as yet novel and unrecognised. In all ordinary cases men may abide by it. What it determines to be fitting, convenient, decorous, wise, must, for the most part, be accepted as such. But it is clear, from the nature of things, that it makes no provision for individual originality, although with the materials furnished by individual originality the common judgment has been built up. In every department of thought or action, therefore, true genius works in utter disregard of the obligations it would impose, and asserts for itself the right of transcending, if need be, any average standard. And until it has proved itself by the event it is looked upon as a craze, or a nuisance, and its projects as hallucinations to be

laughed at as harmless, or frowned upon as mischievous. Where would have been the inspirations which have made society in the present day differ so widely from society at the period of the Norman Conquest if there had been meanwhile no kicking over the traces ?

Implicit faith in Nature is the prolific parent of successful insurrections against the settled government of routine. They who believe that human wisdom, even when condensed and codified, may, after all, be folly as compared with natural law, are generally the stoutest and wildest rebels against authority. Take the science of therapeutics as the closest field at hand for illustration. What myriads of good lives have been drained off from men in the most orthodox manner by vigorous methods of depletion—cathartic drugs, the leech, and the lancet ! What hundreds of thousands have been carefully shut up to perish in the close atmosphere which their own fevered respirations have poisoned, and whose gasping agonies, rightly interpreted, were but entreaties for pure air and plenty of it ! What cart-loads of medicine have been shot into human stomachs to smother temporary forms of disease, and breed, instead of it, irremediable mischief ! Nature protested loudly enough against these murderous follies, but was scouted by the confident knowledge and immovable self-complacency of society, which, of course, knew better. If, at the present moment, our lives are not quite so much at the mercy of learned and systematised empiricism, we are indebted for our partial

immunity and protection to the courageous conscientiousness of men who have studied Nature and made daily suit to her ; listened to her suggestions, caught their import, and believed in them ; and initiated processes of treatment which the stereotyped mediocrity of the world attempted to shout down as the freaks of lunacy, and to punish their authors and abettors with professional ostracism. Humdrum and routine, no doubt, have their useful functions and negative recommendations—but progress is mostly due to the high mettle of those leaders who now and then kick over the traces.

Look at our great inventors ! Were ever men inspired with a new idea and panting to realize it other, in the world's view, than wild, visionary, impracticable, revolutionary, until after success had vindicated their claim to reverential gratitude ? Such men, hard in pursuit of the evasive progeny of their own brains, set at naught all the received maxims of prudence, trampled down hosts of recognised proprieties, made themselves laughing-stocks, sometimes bores, to staid respectabilities, and—succeeded. What if they had preferred listening to the wise saws and sage counsels of those among whom they lived, to obeying the all but irresistible impulses which came upon them from they knew not where ? They might have been more fortunate men, they might have occupied a higher social *status*, they might have escaped the incessant wear and tear of anxieties and disappointments ;

but mankind would not have been their debtors, nor would their own names have been immortal. They became fools that they might be, instead of merely seeming to be, wise.

A man says, "I am not wanted here—there are too many of us. I want scope for my energies—space and promise for enterprise—ampler verge and elbow-room for my capacity of doing, and enduring, and enjoying. I will emigrate to the antipodes." There is nothing very startling in such a resolution in the present day. But fifty years ago, or even twenty years ago, it looked like desperation. What but sheer waywardness could have prompted it? What but disappointment, hardship, and, perhaps, ruin could be expected to come out of it? Nevertheless, people went, heedless of the voice of sobriety, undeterred by the passionate remonstrances of affection, undismayed by the prospects of a solitary and uncivilized life. What have been the consequences—not to themselves, for in but a few instances only can we trace them—but to mankind? A cluster of nascent empires in which English law, English habits, the English language, and the English type of Christianity are predominant. The living force within them, to which the first settlers gave way, was, no doubt, resisted by all the conventional conservatism of the time. Perhaps they could hardly justify, even to themselves, their yielding to it—certainly they could not foresee the mighty issues which have come out of their obedience to it. Yet the event

has proved that it had in it something far above the wisdom of man, and that the history of the world would have been something very different from what it is and promises to be—something far less hopeful—if there were not an occasional disregard of average standards.

Take, as one more illustration, the doctrine of free trade. It dawned upon a few minds as a revelation. Why should not these minds have entertained it as an interesting, abstract speculation, and have left their country to go on as it had done for centuries, in violation of the fundamental principles of political economy? Why should General Thompson, and Richard Cobden, and John Bright, and Archibald Prentice, and George Wilson have taken upon themselves an Apostolic office in reference to the system? According to the established *criteria* of society, the result at which they aimed, however good in itself, was one of so hopeless a character that none but fanatics could think of realizing it. Nor, to confess the truth, could it have been realized in the way of sober conformity to methods which enjoyed the sanction of the public. But these men chose to take counsel of the impulse that moved their own souls, and, regardless of what the public might think, to let that impulse shape their methods of action, and so infuse into them the magical power of life. Of course, they were traduced, for public opinion invariably resents any kicking over the traces. They were denounced as agitators, as

demagogues, as greedy of pelf and profit. Still they heeded only the voice of authority within them, spoke because they had something to say and could not live without saying it, and shaped their plans, not for the world's approval, but with a simple determination to carry out their intentions. "*Si quæris monumentum, circumspice.*"

Illustrations *ad infinitum* might be adduced, beginning with Christianity itself, and including modern movements which, as yet, are but inchoate. Perhaps, if the moral history of mankind were fairly written, it might appear that by far the larger half of their progress has been due to the triumph of individual originality over accepted and authorized wisdom, of individual will over the gravitation of all communities towards fixity and quiescence—in three words, of motion over matter. The position seems, at first blush, to be a dangerous one; but, in reality, nothing that is true is dangerous except to things that are not true. Silly and selfish men may make a bad use of any conclusion, speculative or practical—and fear of silly and selfish men keeps in currency a great amount of *quasi* falsehood. It is better for all, that, in all departments, fact should be looked steadily in the face—for practical wisdom, if it deserve its name, is but a logical inference from fact.

It is interesting to note how, when the world has pretty nearly worn out some one or other of its formulas, and has ceased to be able to get out of it any

real service, the innovation which is destined to push it aside, or, at any rate, prepare the way for its being pushed aside, crops up simultaneously, but without concert, in many different quarters. Whenever this phenomenon is observable, it may be taken for granted that life has passed from its old embodiment, and is beginning to infuse itself into new ones. The new are not necessarily true, but they are movements towards it. They always warrant some important inference with regard to the past—always point the way to some trustworthy development in the future. We have not yet learned how to treat these changes. Most commonly we try to stop them as if they were essentially evil, and regard our failure as evidence of something inveterately wrong. A due attention to the history of the world's moral life would have taught us better. It is for us, not to denounce that which we cannot prevent, but to search for its causes, to study its meaning, to watch its tendencies, and, as far as lies in us, to utilize its vitality and strength. Whenever kicking over the traces becomes common we may be certain that there is need for some alteration of the harness or of the method of driving.

Of course, the wilfulness and waywardness of which I have been speaking, are such as have their origin in genuine and strong conviction, and the limits which they set at naught are those which are prescribed by the average wisdom of society. There *are* aberrations which take their start from the temper. There *are*

bounds which no inward impulse can be justified in overleaping. The temper may be perverse and lawless, the bounds may be divinely appointed. No impulse springing from the one, or regardless of the other, can find an apology in the reason. But the standards established by general consent, so far as they are human, are not final, or, at least, not necessarily so. Hence it is better that individual life, whatever form it may take, which cannot truly and adequately express itself in conformity with those standards, should, nevertheless, do so by such methods as it can devise. Humanity has gained, probably, all that it ever will gain, all that it was meant to gain, from the inflexible rigidity of Orientalism. If there is to be progress, there must also be liberty of thought, speech, and action. The light which is to overspread the whole landscape illumines first the highest peaks, and there must always be a moment when truths commissioned to bless our race gleam only from individual minds. If, instead of agitating ourselves and one another with the foolish fear that the heavens are on fire, we were to conclude that the day is advancing, and wait for its further light, we should commit ourselves to far fewer absurdities than we do. The chimeras of our age, against which authority has vainly spent its force, are, as often as not, the cherished guardians and familiar friends of the next.

I have strayed far from my point of starting, but not altogether away from my subject. Effervescent spirits,

when allowed to take such forms of utterance as are most natural to them, usually subside into something more serious. Hearty laughter is a good preparative for sober thought. The sum of the foregoing observations may be given in few words. Expression should be the law, repression the exception, in regard to all matters in which conscience has not been put under constraint by God. All human judgments may be challenged by individual conviction, and it is better for the world to let the challenger take his chance of success than authoritatively to put him down.



VII.

OUR TOM.

I WENT out to-day, dejected by a saddening domestic bereavement. Our Tom was found dead this morning in a cupboard under the kitchen stairs. I have no general liking for the feline race, but Tom had quietly won a place in the affectionate regard of our family, and his decease was followed, for some days, by a troubled sense of vacancy. It is grievous to be obliged to add that we could not with certainty dissociate his death from an act of loose morality. In justice to his good name, it must be said that he was a cat of highly regular and respectable habits, for the most part. He kept good hours—seldom staying out beyond the usual time of locking-up, and he never got possession of, nor, as it seemed to us, cared to possess, an equivalent to a latch-key, namely, a private entrance of his own. Two nights ago, however, he was missing, and we regretfully concluded that he was “out on a spree.” He did not return, as was his custom on such rare occasions, in the early morning, but in the afternoon he crawled in feebly, faintly mewled a complaint, and drew attention to a

ghastly wound right through his shoulder-blade, through which you might have thrust a couple of fingers into his chest. Poor Tom! We strapped up the wound with all the tenderness and skill at our command—an operation to which he submitted with meekness and patience. We made him a comfortable bed in the kitchen, and laid him upon it, and, within his reach, a saucer of milk. He appeared to get a little better towards night, left his bed, and retired to the dark cupboard. This morning he was found stretched lifeless on a shelf four or five feet above the floor. It was clear that he went there to die, and had put forth all his remaining strength to leap to the resting-place with which he was, no doubt, familiar. We buried him in the garden in the course of the forenoon, and made due lamentation over his grave.

An inquest was held at breakfast, after the body had been viewed, touching the cause of his death. The evidence was found to be but scanty, and applied only to matters relating to him before he left home, to the condition in which he returned, and what had happened since, leaving the entire interval of his absence a blank which could only be filled in by conjecture. Strong suspicions were cast upon the baker's dog, who unquestionably had an evil reputation for worrying cats, and who, it was confidently affirmed, had killed more than one. But, setting aside the injustice of acting on the maxim, "Give a dog a bad name and hang him," the nature of poor Tom's wound did not at all favour

the conclusion. It was suggested that he had been maltreated by boys, who abound in the neighbourhood, and some of whom, it was known, would glory in a cat-hunt as an immensely jolly sport ; but here again, the single wound of which the deceased had died was not easily reconcilable with the surmise, in addition to which Tom was believed to be too nimble to allow himself to come to serious grief in that way. The most probable supposition was that he had been trespassing, drawn aside, perhaps, by bad company, and had been caught in one of those atrociously cruel traps armed with sharp teeth, which close upon their victims as soon as the spring is touched, and hold them tight until released by death, or by some less humane foe. But, on this hypothesis, there ought to have been a double wound, which was not the case. All things considered, we could only come to the open verdict—"Died by violence."

Tom came of highly respectable parentage—at least, on his mother's side. Nothing is known of his father, but Tom's mien, manners, and temper led us to assume that he was "of gentle blood." He was above the average stature of his race, but always remained slim. His tastes were fastidious, and his appetite delicate. He was a tabby, with a brownish grey coat, beautifully marked with dark stripes over the upper part of his body and head, while a band of pure white, commencing between his eyes and widening gradually down to his chest, covered that whole part of his body which was

prone. His legs also, from the knee-joints downwards, including his paws, were purest white. His eyes were full of lustre, but gave a predominant expression of good temper, and of a mildness of disposition approaching langour. Truth compels the admission that when you looked full into them you could see but a little way through those narrow longitudinal slits in the iris down into Tom's soul. In fact, you would detect something sinister in their aspect, which, however, so far as was known, his conduct never justified. Visitors seldom stayed in the house without being struck with admiration at Tom's aristocratic appearance and bearing. He had his faults, as this brief memoir will faithfully disclose ; but

“ take him for all in all,
We ne'er shall look upon his like again.”

He was introduced into our household when a kitten between two and three months' old. He came because he was wanted, not because he was desired. His mother was a pet in a large training school, and, I suspect, had lost amidst the indulgences of her position, and the bewilderment of much company, her instinct for mousing before Tom was born. At any rate, he was sorely deficient in the one qualification for the benefit of which his presence was needed. In his juvenile days, indeed, he used to sit over a mouse-hole, or close by a crack in the wainscoting, and watch with an air of lively interest ; and once, I believe, if not

twice, he caught and killed his prey. But he soon lost the little passion he had for that kind of sport, and his long-tailed game appeared to know it—for one mouse, bolder than his brethren, often ventured out from no one knew where, to pick up crumbs from the parlour-floor in broad daylight, while Tom was stretched upon the hearth-rug fast asleep. At night, when sent down to the basement-floor, he would pounce upon crickets, and crunch cockroaches, more in play, it seemed, than because he cared for them. But he had a real and irresistible *penchant* for birds. Having once got taste of them, he disdained mice. Half his time during the day was spent on the window-sill of a top bed-chamber, watching with eagerest interest the flight of sparrows to and fro, who, secure against his spring from such a height, hopped on the creeper which covered the wall, and impudently chirped defiance from within a few feet of him. The excitement, probably, was a pleasure which he could not forego, for no chastisement could break his habit of stealing up-stairs and sitting outside that window. At any rate, there is not the smallest likelihood that he ever got anything by it *but* excitement—for the birds were cunning, and if Tom had only missed his footing, he would have been smashed by his fall.

It became clear to us, however, that Tom was not an entirely unsuccessful sportsman, especially about the period when young birds, under parental superintendence, ventured upon their first flight from the nest. A

tiny quill or two from some youngster's wing, left on the garden walk, raised against him strong suspicions which were not conclusive only because other cats of much fiercer mien were known to prowl about the premises. But after Tom had presented himself, as he did more than once, looking quite unconcious of guilt, with a small feather sticking to his whiskers, he completely routed all charitable surmises that he might be innocent. All other facts which told against him,—his neglect of the food provided and set apart for him, his snuffing indifference to the dainty bits sometimes offered him from the dinner-table, his eager upturned gaze whenever any winged creature passed above him, at whatever height, and his long absences from the house (some of them in very uninviting weather), might have been got over; but coming home with the evidence of his crime upon him distinctly visible to all, why, he might as well have been surprised *flagrante delicto*. If he had restricted himself to sparrows, he might have been chidden and forgiven. But there was "metal more attractive" in the garden, and Tom's ambition struck at a nobler quarry. Last year, a pair of blackbirds built their nest in the thick hedge which divides one part of our little domain from that of our neighbours, and as the cock bird, throughout the process of incubation, warbled mellifluous songs to keep up the spirits of his mate, and after it, I suppose, to please the home circle, and as we took as much delight in his jubilant carols as they did who were near and

dear to him, we watched the growth of the brood with keen solicitude. Tom, too, was on the watch, but for a different purpose. One day he was seen to emerge slowly from beneath the laurel hedge immediately opposite this happy home, and, moving stealthily across the grass plot, rear himself on his hind legs, and peer upwards through the intervening thicket. Of course, he was chased off with unmistakeable demonstrations of wrath. But Tom knew his time as well as most cats. He slipped out in the evening; he stayed out all night. What he did no deponent was found to testify; but next day the fledglings were all gone, and the hedge exhibited indubitable evidence of having been violently disturbed from beneath. If it had been a quickset we should have looked for fur, but being but a privet no trace of the brigand was left behind. Tom's reputation was under a cloud for a long while after that incident.

In justice to the memory of our departed friend, however, it ought to be known that his passion for sport was intermittent. He had higher tastes. He seemed to love the garden for its own sake, and in a high wind, always provided that it was also dry, he took great delight in watching the swaying of the bushes and flowers, and arched his back and set up his tail and leaped, and sped backwards and forwards across the lawn, evidently believing that his vegetable friends were having a romp with him. In summer time he was accustomed to follow any of the members of the family into the garden, and purr, and rub his head against their

nether garments, and ask in his own fashion, as plainly as if he could speak, "Isn't it jolly?" If any one sat outside to read, or write, or work, Tom was sure to show himself within a few minutes, and throw himself lengthwise upon the grass, and invite recognition. But his choicest time was in the evening, when watering the beds was going forward. No doubt, he thought it was done for his special delectation. He became as curious as a magpie, and as merry as a grig. Now he was here, now there—up a tree in a trice, and down again almost as quickly—cautiously creeping close up to you as if to watch the operation, then suddenly bounding off again with affected terror and infinite glee. In fact, Tom had a boundless store of resources out of doors. He would pounce at butterflies on the wing, or insects in the grass. He would torment frogs, and make them scream with terror by patting them upon the back, and, when nothing more exciting offered, he would leisurely and soberly walk his rounds, as though intent on seeing whether anything was up.

He never slept in the garden unless under assured protection, and then with blinking eyes—not that he cared for the heat of the sun, for he would sit in it for hours upon the wall, never seeking out, what he might easily have found at any hour of the day, a shady spot. The truth is, he was somewhat of a voluptuary. A velvetine arm-chair, a damask-covered sofa, or, when he durst venture, a downy bed, had immense attraction for him during the forenoon, and, if left undisturbed, he

would sleep for hours in almost any recumbent attitude—curled up into a ball, or stretched out upon his side, or with front paw over his upturned nose—and snore like any Christian. A lady's lap, however, had for him a pre-eminent charm. Although scarcely ever nursed, he never lost his irresistible desire to settle himself down in that Paradise. He would coolly bound up upon a lady's knees twenty times in an hour, and try to take possession of the blissful resting-place, and, when at last convinced that he would not be gratified, he couched at her feet upon the border of her dress. Tom would try any stranger of the fair sex who took a seat for a few minutes. There seemed to be some sort of electrical affinity between himself and any feminine member of the human family, or it might be her attire. He was almost always more free than welcome; but no rebuffs could effectually break his habit, and occasionally, but very rarely, he met with those who were glad to indulge him, to whom he testified his delight, if not his gratitude, in purring strains.

On winter evenings, Tom used to get uncommonly lively. When he was but a kitten one expected it as a matter of course; but, in a cat past his prime, it was extremely ridiculous. He might be tempted any time, up to the day of his death, on to the table for a game of play, and, with a little crunched-up ball of paper pushed from side to side by those who sat round it, he went through the most agile and graceful acrobatic movements. He had marvellous self-restraint. When

taught that he would not be allowed to touch the balls on the bagatelle board, he managed, in the face of the most trying temptations, to sit still and keep his paws to himself. But see the game he would. No indoor amusement pleased him better. He followed the balls with sparkling eyes, and got nervously excited by their rattle. But it needed only a hint now and then to restrict him within proper bounds, and when he did forget himself, it was generally to meddle with the pegs that marked the progress of the game.

Tom was every inch of him a gentleman ; by which I mean that he governed himself by rules that, for the most part, fitted in with the habits, customs, and wishes of those among whom he lived. He was scrupulously clean—if the whole truth must be told, a little given to dandyism. A very disproportionate share of his time was spent in dressing, but really the glossiness and beauty of his coat at all times pleaded an ample apology for him. But he managed himself in other respects with exemplary self-control. The pantry was accessible to him often enough in the course of the day, but he was above purloining his food. No one dreamed of suggesting, when dishes were broken, that “the cat did it.” He was too careful to break anything. He would go into the green-house, when any one was employed there, and walk along the stands on which the plants were ranged, picking his way among them with nice precision, injuring nothing, removing nothing. He never blundered, never miscalcu-

lated. The only exception to this harmlessness of his was, that, when a change of weather was impending, he would insert his fore claws in the chair-bottoms or window drapery, and, having made fast, would curve his back inwards and stretch the muscles of his chest. He did not even beg at the dinner-table unless there chanced to be fried fish upon it—*that* was too much for his manners, for, under that stimulus, he became so importunate that he had to be put out of the room.

With members of his own species, I fancy, Tom was not popular. He was far too reserved. He had no cherished friends. He showed very little fellow-feeling. He joined no company. He seldom even fought, and when he did—as he did occasionally, if his wounds might be taken as conclusive evidence—he fought at night. No solicitation from his neighbours elicited from him any sign of interest. There might be a feline brawl in the next garden carried on with desperate caterwauling, interspersed with sudden jets of hiss and sputter—but, though seated where he could overlook the fray, he seldom turned his head. The only intimacy he was ever known to display towards what we may call a compeer, was when he was a kitten, and had a Skye terrier for his mate. After their first few skirmishes, they became remarkably attached to each other, and, until the time when Jack was sent off in a hamper to a new home, Tom was wont to curl himself up between the dog's legs, and pass the night with him.

But he had very endearing ways towards his human friends. Miserable in their absence, he eagerly sought their company, and, when allowed, was demonstrative of his affection. Often when I have been engaged in writing, he has taken up his position upon my left arm, and has sat, for an hour or two, rubbing his head against my coat-sleeve, looking every now and then with blinking eyes into my face, and purring his song of complacency. Or, when fatigued, I have thrown myself upon the sofa, lit a cigar, and taken up a newspaper or a book, he has jumped up with nimble bound, settled himself upon my chest, with his face towards mine, and gently patted my face with his velvet paw. He was extremely sensitive, and could not bear being made game of. A practical joke would offend his sense of dignity, and when laughed at, he would instantly turn tail, walk with a sort of sullen majesty towards the door, and sit there with his back to the company until he got an opportunity for escape. It was seldom, however, that his feelings were hurt in this way. He was too much respected to be often teased.

The main incident of Tom's life, besides that mysterious one which brought it to a close, was a family removal, after he was full-grown, from one house to another. When all the carpets were up, and all the goods packed, Tom wandered from room to room in utter bewilderment. He appeared to conclude that "where there is life there is hope," and, therefore, as the mistress remained on the premises, he kept her

within sight. But her moment for quitting them came, and, with several packages of articles needing special care, she took her seat in the fly that was to bear her to her new home. Tom was easily caught by one of the workmen, and handed into the vehicle. He was wonderfully subdued. He sat as quietly as possible in the lap of his mistress, only lifting himself up to look out of the fly window occasionally, as if to take note of the direction in which he was being carried. On arrival at his destination, he meekly suffered himself to be handed out to a servant, who buttered his feet and shut him up in an empty cupboard. There he remained several hours a close prisoner, and was then set at liberty. He walked very carefully over the basement of the new habitation, smelt round the kitchen walls, found everything strange to him, and—disappeared. Nothing more was seen of him for the next two days, after which he presented himself at the back door, bedabbled, dirty, gaunt, and famishing, and received, as might be supposed, quite an ovation. We concluded that he had found his way back to the house we had recently left—about three miles—but finding it shut up and untenanted, lurked about on the outside until hunger overpowered his local attachment, and then retraced his steps home. He soon became reconciled to the change, and did not venture upon truancy a second time.

And now we have taken our last farewell of poor Tom. He sleeps his last sleep under the sod. What

has become of the living principle which animated his graceful form we will not inquire. Common belief assures us that it is extinct for ever. Perhaps so; but inasmuch as we *know* nothing about it, we don't feel ourselves bound to accept any conclusion on the subject. All we do know is, that Tom lives in the affectionate memory of his friends, and that, for the present at least, he will have no successor. The manner of his death makes us shy of rearing another favourite, while the manner of his life makes us doubt whether, if we did, we should find his equal. It is possible that mice may compel us at some future time to keep a cat, but should such be the case, we are all agreed that it shall not be admitted to the vacant place which our Tom has left in our hearts.



VIII.

FLOWERS. .

To one who, although resident in a populous district, is within easy reach of good country walks—an advantage, however, which in the neighbourhood of the metropolis is being, bit by bit, filched from him every year by the builders—one of the commonest incidents falling under his observation in his daily excursions, is an illustration, in one or other of its various expressions, of the passion for flowers. In springtime, especially, he will hardly ever come across a group of children going to, or returning from, the village-school perhaps, or, it may be, abroad for a holiday, who do not exhibit proof of being, or having been, in quest of floral treasures. Sometimes he will see them on the foot-path, far ahead of him, watching, with upturned faces, one of their number, who, more daring than the rest, has clambered up the hedgerow bank on the other side of the ditch, and, braving the peril of a torn dress or a scratched skin, attempts to make spoil of a tempting sprig of hawthorn, or a wild honeysuckle, far above.

Sometimes he will abruptly come upon them seated together in a gateway off the road, their laps filled, and their eyes and hands busy in choosing and putting together the best of what their morning's stroll has yielded them. Sometimes they will meet him with their posies finally distributed among themselves, and neatly arranged, making for home with beaming countenances, too intent upon what they hold in their hands to notice him, or, if they do, more pleased that their flowers than themselves should attract his eye. It scarcely matters what may be their condition of life. Poor or well off, taught or untaught, wherever wild-flowers are accessible, and there are children to get at them, flower-gathering will be a favourite pastime.

The passion is not by any means confined to the young. Which of us, long after the buoyancy of youth is a thing of memory only, as he catches sight of tufts of primroses or patches of wild hyacinths in the copse by the wayside, does not feel the stirring of an impulse within him to look hither and thither for some gap in the hedge through which he may trespass and carry off a nosegay? What dangers have not men, and even women, dared, to reach a rare orchis perched upon a jutting shelf on the face of a cliff? We are all familiar with Cowper's "Dog and Water-lily," but we are not all as prudent as the poet was to set proper limits to our venturesomeness in search of flowers. And, after all, there needs not the excitement of danger to tempt our liking for them into active exercise. Meet with

them where we will, they have a strange attraction for us. A moss-rose, bought for a penny of an ill-favoured drab in the city, is cherished and fondled through the day in many a murky counting-house or dusky chamber. Flowers are sure to find customers in the streets of London. You may catch sight of them, evidently tended with affectionate care, in the upper windows of the most beggarly and dilapidated houses abutting upon the railway by which you go to town. The chances are that two or more of the gentlemen in the same compartment with you have some gem-like greenhouse flower in their button-holes. In the gay season of Nature, every waggoner on the road adorns his horses' heads with a bunch of wild-flowers, and takes pride in them. Wild or highly cultivated, in the mead or the hedgerow, the garden or the conservatory, flowers are universally attractive, and are admiringly caressed by all ranks and conditions of men.

What is the true explanation of this? In what does the special charm of the floral race consist? What are the ingredients of the spell they exert upon us? We call them beautiful, but then we also call a great variety of other things beautiful, which have no such fascination for us as flowers. It is not their colour alone, nor their form, nor their fragrance, nor their texture, nor all of them together, which will fully account for the fond regard we are wont to display towards them. They do more than gratify our senses, more than please

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our taste, more than excite our admiration. We love them with a delicacy and tenderness of love quite peculiar. The hard, rugged, coarse-minded man momentarily softens towards them. They get at the heart of the proudest and most reserved. The man of many cares, and harassed with the endless worries of business, is soothed, or, what amounts to the same thing, fancies he is, by the companionship of a choice flower. Women everywhere rejoice in them as darling pets. They are indispensable on all festal occasions, more particularly at a wedding, where they are almost as necessary as the bride. They carry with them into the sick room a gleam of gladness, and are sometimes fondly clasped by the wan hand that is already cold with the damp of death. Many things, it is true, are more necessary to us; yet if we were bidden to choose which of God's blessings we would part with for ever, how few could make up their minds to bid farewell to flowers! As we have said, there is something peculiar in our love of flowers—something which makes it different from our love of other objects. What *is* the difference? A cursory glance at the constituent elements of the pleasure they give us will not be without its interest to some, even although the majority may content themselves with the belief that God made flowers to please them, and care to go no further.

There is no need to dilate upon those qualities in flowers which address themselves directly to the bodily

senses—such as their structure, form, colours, and perfume. Of course, they enter largely into the enjoyment we derive from the objects they qualify, but, of themselves they do not explain the uniqueness of our attachment—if love should be objected to as too strong a word—to flowers. There is something lying at the back of them which through the outer senses makes an appeal to the inner man; and of this something *life* is the rudiment. Life—for unquestionably the absence of it makes all the difference between affection and admiration. Artificial flowers, as a work of art, may gratify, may even enchant us; but it is the perfection of art, not the subjects of it, which in their case win our delight and commendation. The living flower not only affects us more powerfully in degree than the manufactured one, but also in a different way. It excites quite another set of feelings—just as a living man interests us quite differently from a statue or a painting of one, however well executed. It is as things having life that flowers charm us, and all the more if we have tended them during their growth, and made ourselves acquainted with their individual habits. Life it is which removes beauty of any sort out of the category of objects to be admired, into that of objects cognisable by the affections. Art may sometimes stand in lieu of nature so far as the senses only are concerned—but can it farther? It may satisfy our judgment and our taste—it can only indirectly touch our feelings. We praise art, we commune with nature.

May it not be that the life that is in flowers takes hold of our sympathies all the more readily because its mode of manifestation differs so widely from that of our own? All life is mysterious, and, because it is so, is regarded as having, more or less, a touch of sanctity in it. But with animal life we are familiar. We can compare it with our own experience, and every form of it with which we come in contact is looked upon as a lower type of that which we ourselves possess. The mystery of flower-life is not merely unfathomable—for that is true of life of any kind—but is clean beyond the range of comparison with our own. We cannot degrade it even in conception. We cannot get near enough to it to connect it with debasing associations. Its conditions shock none of our sensibilities. It seldom, if ever, comes under our observation except in forms adapted to gratify us. There may be exceptions enough to prove the rule—but, undoubtedly, the rule is that the life of flowers presents to man no characteristics but such as are pleasing. It is softly beneficent—a secret into which we cannot enter, but which always has an aspect of kindness towards us. We can approach flowers without fear, we can fondle them without a shade of mistrust, we can tend them without laying ourselves open to an ungrateful return. They never wound us by ill-temper, and the spirit that animates them invariably breathes calmness and benignity.

While this life, however, so different in its develop-

ment from our own, and yet, in some respects, so imitative of it, underlies our attachment to flowers, its extreme frailty infuses into our affection a peculiar tenderness. The sensitive, shrinking, exquisitely delicate little things—oh, how easily they are crushed! what seemingly trivial causes make them droop and languish! how quickly they fade! how soon and how utterly they die! Every quality they possess is a meek protest against rough usage—a mute but pathetic appeal to us to deal gently with them—for we are apt to love them “not wisely but too well,” and unless we are very dainty in our modes of caring for and caressing them, their loveliness is ruined, and the spirit of their life is gone. Some, indeed, are hardy to the agencies of the seasons—snow, rain, wind, sun—but for the most part, they are too frail for extremes, can bear but little suffering, and, under the pressure of a heavy grief, quietly pass away. This extraordinary tenderness and fragility, this evanescent tendency of flower-life, wakes a corresponding tenderness in our souls. We never feel angry with flowers. If we pick them to pieces, it is not because *they* have provoked us, but because some mighty passion or sorrow has overmastered us, and we know not what we do. Certainly the specialty of our interest in flowers, is due, in no ordinary measure, to their extreme sensitiveness and delicacy.

Due mainly, not wholly, to that. We associate with floral life our most vivid notions of freshness, innocence, and purity. To us flowers are the very ideal of un-

selfishness. They live to please, not themselves, but others. They modestly, and the greater part of them without so much as the faintest semblance of self-consciousness, put forth the beauty that is in them, and offer their sweet incense to the passer-by, be he a beggar or a prince, without stint, without trace of an *arrière pensée*, saying as plainly as natural language can express the sentiment, "for your sake we do it." And yet they do not pine for want of notice. They give freely, let who will accept or refuse. They spread abroad their favours without measuring the effect they will produce. And then, their ineffable purity! how cleanly, how stainless, how bright! God has endowed them with the power of keeping themselves "unspotted from the world" in which they live, and they either do it or die. It is this characteristic which mingles with our sensuous affection for flowers a sort of moral tinge. The purity of the object passes over in some measure to the regard which it elicits, lending to it somewhat of its own nature, and so making it worthy. Then, again, flowers have mostly a joyous expression—not passionately so, but staidly, as if happiness were their birthright, and they knew it. All this enters into and colours our attachment. We are not ashamed of our fondness, for there is nothing in the objects of it fitted to shame us.

Is there not another consideration which serves to deepen in reflective minds the interest with which flowers are regarded—namely, the absolute and visible depen-

dence of their life and of all its manifestations upon the care of the Creator? All creatures, of course, are really dependent upon Divine provision and protection; but the animal tribes *seem* to be endowed with higher powers of self-preservation and action than the vegetable. Flowers do not possess even the semblance of ability to shift for themselves. They strike one as coming more immediately than other objects in which there is life under the superintendence of God. They *do* not, but they have the appearance of it to us. "Behold the lilies of the field; they toil not, neither do they spin: and yet I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." We all feel the truth conveyed in these memorable words. The most charming objects in the realm of nature seem to be the most dependent on nature's God. They do nothing for themselves. They make no provision against their own wants. They take no steps to escape the liabilities to which their frail lives are exposed—and yet how marvellously tended! Helpless they are, but never abandoned. Powerless to order their own well-being—and yet how peaceful! how bright! how perfect! It may be said of them, as of the stars, "Not one faileth." He who looks after them puts honour upon them. His work, when most exclusively His, shows least imperfection.

Therefore being, as they are, cast most completely upon the care of God, they show most distinctly and suavely the mind of their Maker. They have an

evangel for men, and faithfully and eloquently do they proclaim it. See in them what He is to whom they owe their all. See the infinitude of resources lavished upon what may be described as the purely ornamental works of nature. What an inexhaustible variety of loveliness! what minuteness of care! what refinement of grace! what exquisite finish! what endless combinations, all expressive of beauty, of gentleness, of goodness! Let him who thinks he can so far forget God as to deny His being, or the continuance of His intimate relations and purposes of loving-kindness to this our world, make his experiment in a wilderness of flowers; and every one of them will breathe out a reflection and a rebuke of the blind thanklessness of his spirit. If it be true, as, in one sense, no doubt, it is, that

“A thing of beauty is a joy for ever,”

what a profusion of the materials of joy has the Creator sown broadcast over the surface of the earth! Welcome, then, the flowers that can tell us so much, and so well, of their Sovereign Lord! Welcome, for their own sweet sakes—and thrice welcome for the soothing, cheering, touching message of goodness, and thoughtful care, and gentleness, and purity, which they bring to us from Him!



IX.

TRADESMEN'S CARTS.

"I'm glad of it," I said in my haste some few days since, when the butcher's horse suddenly came down on his knees and nose, broke a shaft of the cart, and pitched the lad, who was driving at a reckless pace down the hill, clean into the hedge. I am not sure that it was the first exclamation jerked out of my mouth by the half-expected accident, but as soon as I saw that neither boy nor horse was much hurt—which, indeed, was within half a minute—I am ashamed to confess that some such savage ejaculation rose up to my lips and burst into words like a bubble from the bottom of a foul pond. Certainly, I wished no serious mishap either to the half-grown biped, or the full-grown quadruped, and was greatly relieved by the prompt and incontestable evidence which met my eyes, almost before I had time to think, that no bones were broken. Nevertheless, there was a fuller flavour of gratified vindictiveness of feeling in the almost involuntary utterance, than was pleasant to me when I recovered my self-possession. I could not smooth away the offence

into which I had been surprised, so as to take it wholly from under the jurisdiction of my conscience, and my after-thoughts, upon weighing all the preceding provocations, brought me in "Guilty, with extenuating circumstances."

Having made a clear breast of it thus far, I feel entitled to bespeak the sympathy of my readers. "It is the last feather which breaks the camel's back," and it was not until after a long series of petty persecutions that my temper fairly gave way. This particular butcher-boy was not, by any means, the only one that had played upon my nerves. There are at least half-a-dozen of them who whisk about hither and thither within the radius of my ordinary morning walk. Add to these a fishmonger or two, four or five bakers, sundry dairymen, several grocers, and a few purveyors of vegetables, and you will have a fair but not an exhaustive list of tradesmen's carts of the neighbourhood. But their number will give but a small idea of the annoyance they occasion to a pedestrian. They are almost invariably entrusted to boys, who, being expected to get over the ground as quickly as possible, gratify their own taste, and commend themselves to their employers, by "furious driving." One never seems to get out of their reach. You hear behind you the tramping of horses' hoofs, and the rattle of cart-wheels. The road, perhaps, is dusty, or, a soaking rain having fallen in the night, is over your boot-soles with mud. You draw aside to a narrow foot-path, if there be one,

and are fidgeting till you have been passed. By goes the blue-frocked Jehu at a slashing pace, not the least concerned to give you a wide berth, or to slacken speed, but seemingly pleased to hug the side of the road on which you walk. Phew ! the cloud of dust with which you are enveloped, or the spatter of mud which flies by you and gives you but little chance of escape ! You have hardly recovered your equanimity before you overtake the said cart which has pulled up at a villa not far ahead, where our Jehu may be observed poking fun at the cook, as he delivers over to her the joints or the loaves, or the bundle of grocery, as the case may be. Precisely the same nuisance has to be tolerated again, and again, and still again within a mile or two, and when one cart has finally distanced you, another arrives to dodge you in the same provoking style.

As to pursuing any strain of thought whilst these reckless youngsters are passing and repassing you—except the rather wrathful thoughts which *they* suggest—you might as well attempt to do it as you cross Cheapside when it is most crowded with vehicles. Cabmen are not over nice in deferring to the convenience of foot-passengers, but cabmen are not to be compared with butcher-boys. They are a tribe of themselves, and the same remark may be made of their horses. There is a rollicking audacity about both, differing only in this, that in the boys it seems natural, in their beasts it is constrained. In all parts of the kingdom, to which my observation has extended,

butcher-boys are alike. They are not, that I am aware of, more prone to evil than other boys. Off their horses, or out of their carts, they come up to the full average of boy nature and boy manners. They are quite as kind and obedient to their parents, as honest in their service, as generous among their play-mates, as other boys. But upon, or behind, a horse, they are to be carefully avoided. Their single, absorbing desire, in this position is to push on. What may become of *you*, is your concern, not theirs. Have you no eyes, no ears, no care for your own clothes, limbs, or life? What are they to the boy? Why should he worry his mind with matters so utterly outside of his sphere? His business is *to go*—yours to take care of yourself. And, accordingly, he does go, quite as much, perhaps, to his own hazard, as to yours. He dashes round sharp corners at an awful pace. He gallops over a cross road without looking right or left. He drives down hill at break-neck speed, without the smallest perceptible tremor of his nerves. Or if on horseback, he throws the whole weight of his body on one stirrup, balances himself with his basket of meat on the other, and rides as if with the foregone purpose of riding down everything that may come in his way. He is the terror of nursemaids and children. Dogs, fowls, and even pigs, scud aside at his approach, and let him pass. Every now and then we hear a sad tale of some one having been run over—a child, or an old man, perhaps—and it is always the butcher's cart that has done it. It may

be a very convenient institution, but, certainly, it is a very dangerous one.

“Unrestricted competition” is the mainspring of trade, but, assuredly, the modes of applying it, at least in the metropolitan suburbs, bring out some very absurd and annoying results. General Thompson, in his “Corn-law Catechism,” we think, illustrates the wasteful effects of Protection, by a reference to the monkeys at Exeter 'Change. Each monkey was confined in a separate cage, and their food was given to them in pans running along the bottom of the barred fronts of their several cages. When the pans were filled with food, it used to be the practice of every hairy manikin to neglect that which was before him, and thrust his long arm through the wire-work as far as possible on the one side or the other, that he might enjoy the pleasure of snatching something out of his neighbour's pan, his neighbour being equally intent upon helping himself out of his. The consequence was, an immense amount of unnecessary scrambling, a great deal of food dropped in the universal struggle, and a scantier supper to each monkey than he would have had if each had been contented with his own pan. It is a striking representation of the habits of suburban tradesmen. Take a circle the diameter of which shall be four miles. The baker, the grocer, or the butcher, at one point, seems to think it a smart thing to cut out the customers of the baker, the grocer, or the butcher at an opposite point, and these again return the com-

pliment. The effect is, that the customer is frequently supplied by a tradesman living three or four miles away, when he might be equally well supplied by one living half-a-dozen doors off, who, to avenge himself, and make the balance even, sends his articles to customers living within a stone's throw of his rival. Between them there is an immense waste of cartage, and an intolerable nuisance to the neighbourhood; and, of course, the whole round of consumers are saddled with the needless additional expense. I do not believe that this is the best organization of local trade which human wisdom can devise. I do not profess to be able to suggest a better; and, until the maxim of "live, and let live" comes to be more honoured and observed than it is, I suppose things will go on in their present absurd fashion. Every line of communication will be traversed and re-traversed a dozen times a day by a score or two of tradesmen's carts, when, under due organization, half-a-dozen would suffice.

I never did believe thoroughly in the soundness of the principle of individual selfishness as a basis of human civilization and progress, and the longer I live, and the more I observe, the weaker is my faith. The money-getting process which excludes all consideration for the welfare of others, and guides itself by rules all but mechanical, taking no account of, and paying no deference to, the higher rules of morality further than is necessary to keep on the safe side of the law, is not destined, I am convinced, to conduct mankind to their

loftiest pitch of development. Trade is not merely the blind action of a certain kind of social machinery, the forces of which are inevitable and mathematically calculable, but is a state of discipline designed to exercise, strengthen, and establish moral character. The acquisition of wealth is not the chief end of man, nor will an exclusive obedience to the laws by which it is regulated, or, at any rate, seems to be, lay the foundation of the worthiest individual character, or the truest national greatness. A thriving wholesale tradesman, expounding to a friend some new plans which he had projected, was reminded that they would probably make *him* richer, but would inevitably ruin So-and-so, and So-and-so, his fellow-members in the same religious community. "What have I to do with that," he asked in utter astonishment. "Wherever I can turn an honest penny, I have a right to do so ; let others look out for themselves." And this total negation of the moral claims of others is generally accepted as a sound, and, indeed, inexorable maxim of trade. The butcher-boy who drives his cart full swing within a yard of you and covers you with mud thrown up by his horse's heels, may plead as ample a justification of what he does. "My purpose," he might say, "is to get over the ground as soon as possible ; if you are incommoded by it, that is your concern." There is falsity and meanness at the bottom of it, which no manipulation of abstract economical terms can transmute. Men or nations who act upon this principle, and to whom con-

sideration for others is regarded as mere sentiment, have not the stuff in them which can develop into greatness, nor even into respectability, save such as is temporary and factitious. "You cannot weave a silk purse out of a sow's ear."

I should be sorry to think that in the conduct of trade, the great Christian maxim, "Do unto others as you would they should do unto you," is practically inapplicable. If it be, the fact reflects gravely upon the adaptation of revealed truth to the whole scope of human life. What an immense space of the action of man upon man is necessarily covered by trade, and if, within that space, human nature cannot reasonably put itself under the government of its loftiest attributes, one is driven to doubt either the wisdom of Divine Providence in sending such a large proportion of men to so bad a school, or the Divine authority of those truths which make up the sum and substance of Christianity. On what principles commercial laws should be framed in order to secure to every one a *maximum* of individual rights in the business of buying and selling, is one thing, on what principles the rights thus secured should be individually used, is another and a very different thing. It is of the latter I am speaking. No philosophy can be absolutely true—true as a whole—which does not take account of the relationships we sustain to one another, and to the moral claims which arise out of them. The apostolic injunction, "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on

the things of others," is also the injunction of the highest reason. Life that is worth anything must be life with an object beyond and above itself. The wider that object is, and the more largely it embraces the well-being of others, the more nearly does it approach the fullest development of which it was made capable. The more disinterested its manifestations, the worthier, and the worthier, the happier. Reason teaches us thus much, and whether it was originally disclosed to us by reason or revelation, it is backed by the authority of the one no less than by that of the other. If a man *cannot* in the sphere of trade govern himself by the laws which best become him—if there he is to be his own exclusive end, and is to be ruled by wholly selfish motives—and if legitimate trade can only be organized on this narrow basis, whereby consideration for others must of necessity be cast aside as irrelevant—then the position assigned to him not only does not correspond with, but is contradictory of, the capabilities with which he has been endowed.

This I, for one, do not believe, cannot believe it. Nor, indeed, do I see any necessity for it. I can conceive of an organization of trade upon the highest and most unselfish principles endorsed by Christianity, and I cherish the hope that at some future time, possibly a very remote one, the world will witness it. What is possible to individuals is possible to all; and it is possible to individuals even now to order their trading transactions upon a foundation not merely

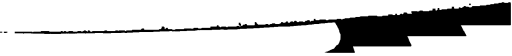
of justice to others, but of generosity, of large-hearted concessions, of delicate care, of high-minded abstinence from all that is calculated to injure or annoy. Instances of it are not wanting; and they prove that the self-sacrificing spirit of Christian faith thrown into trade, has as much power there as it has in any other department of human affairs. The present universal scramble for whatever advantage can be got without forfeiture of a reputation for honesty, is simply discreditable to our common nature. It may plead what it will in its own behalf, but it cannot do otherwise than degrade our noblest powers, and darken our brightest hopes. But its pleas, I am convinced, rest upon a fallacy, the fallacy of assuming that man has been placed in this world for no more exalted purpose than to buy, and sell, and get gain. He may do all three in perfect subordination to the grandest, as well as to the most sordid motives, and he who elects to put himself under the sway of the latter in business, has no title to be credited with better ones in other spheres of life.

As the world goes, however, I am afraid we shall have to put up with the nuisance of a vast deal of unnecessary and noisy machinery in the carrying on of trade. There is a surplusage of tradesmen's carts everywhere; not literally, perhaps, but in a figure. Everywhere greed will drive past you, so intent upon its own objects, as not to have a thought upon what may be due to your convenience, and may rather relish than otherwise the sport of choking you with the dust

which it stirs, or covering you with the mire which it scatters. "Every man for himself, and God for us all," is the motto of the system, and under it, of course, "the weaker goes to the wall." Complaints are useless; we shall do better to smile and submit. Only, let it be understood, that this is not the kind of thing for endless and fulsome glorifications. The doctrine of the age places, or strives to place, the acquisition of wealth above all other success, and the most rapturous applause of mankind is challenged for the general upshot of a process, the several parts of which it were best not to examine too microscopically. "Material progress" may be a great thing, but, Heaven be praised, it is not the greatest, even in this life. Character immensely transcends riches, and, unfortunately, riches do not invariably infer character. What is true of a man is true of a nation of men. A man may reach affluence and yet remain little better than a brute; nay, he may reach it by means which go far to make and keep him a brute. And a nation may attain splendour, and yet not rise to a position of exalted dignity. There is danger of having true nobility of sentiment submerged under a flood of commercial success, and of making the wealth of a country, and the extent of its transactions, the measure of its virtue, and the test of its civilization. Against this danger it is the duty of reason and religion to warn men. It is no disgrace to be "a nation of shopkeepers," but it would be a real degradation to surrender itself body and soul to shop-

keeping maxims, as the loftiest to which its destiny can be conformed.

The true intent of life is to expand the best and most glorious possibilities of human nature ; to bring out of the man all that he is capable of ; to make him grow, and put forth leaves, and blossom, and bear fruit ; and thus to contribute his part, and find his happiness in contributing it, to the wellbeing of God's creation. His dignity consists, not in what he can absorb, but in what he can produce ; and the more service he renders the higher is his place in the scale of virtue. Wealth is to him, or should be, what manure is to the vegetable world—useless, save as it develops that in him in which society can rejoice. The current mistake is to regard the collection of heaps of manure as the “be-all and end-all” of personal and national existence, and to forget to inquire what we are all doing with the material good we receive, and how far it is promoting growth, refinement, and elevation of character. So far as it is conducing to this end it is a blessing, and so far the inconveniences which the efforts to acquire it may occasion, should be cheerfully borne. But, just in proportion as it stops short of it, or puts impediments in the way to it, it is a loss rather than a gain, and the annoyances which the scramble for it occasions are without compensation and excuse.





X.

FANCY NEIGHBOURHOODS.

WE looked forward to F——'s visit with rather excited expectations. Dear old fellow—it seems natural to call him *old*, because he is a bachelor, and has grey hair, although, in fact, he has not yet got more than a pace or two, if so much, beyond his prime—it was rather the occasion of his visit than the visit itself which put us into a flutter. No, reader, you are quite wrong in your guess; he had *not* come a-courting, so we were easy enough on that score. He had come with a view to a day or two's house-hunting, and we were speculating with some confidence upon having him for a neighbour. As usual, when you are reckoning without your host, we looked at the prospect mainly from our own point of view. We resided just upon the border of a fancy neighbourhood, and as he had lived for several years in a square within a couple of miles of the heart of the city, of whose external attractions the less that is said the better, perhaps, we took for granted that his mind would be charmingly open to agreeable impressions. With a relish which house-

hunting, when pursued on one's own behalf never imparts, we scoured the district several days before his arrival, made a list of available domiciles that would be "just the thing," with a very trivial defect in each case, and persuaded ourselves that the only element of uncertainty remaining was which house he would prefer. As for myself, I began to discount beforehand the luxury of having one close at hand whose presence was like balm; whose mind resembled a garden well laid out and beautifully kept, full of choice flowers, and fragrant shrubs, and mellow fruits, over which a run at pleasure would have been a precious privilege; and whose heart was always large and always open. Why, it would be the turning over to a new leaf in life. Under the influence of this feeling, I was already beginning to brighten up, to look at things in the light in which I thought they would strike him, and to pre-arrange sundry little plans which might render easy and familiar intercourse both delightful and profitable. And this it was which made our now narrowed family look forward to his visit with pleased expectancy.

He came, he saw, and—he went away again. A fancy neighbourhood did not take *his* fancy. True, the weather was not particularly brilliant, but I doubt whether any kind of weather would have affected his decision. As we went over house after house on our list, I could see the shadow of his distaste gradually creeping over his countenance, and becoming more and more settled. Indeed, upon a second inspection, every

residence assumed to myself, now that I was in his company, a much less inviting aspect than it had done before. The reason probably was that he had given me the key to his wishes, and I saw at a glance that they were not likely to be suited in our parts. I was, therefore, far less surprised than disappointed by the information, about a month afterwards, that he had fixed upon a habitation in one of the suburbs which is not popular with city gentlemen, which certainly is *not* new, and which is free from most of the disadvantages which attach to a fancy neighbourhood. I will not insist upon it, even now, that I have accurately interpreted his views and feelings on the matter, but, as I have gone over the ground—not the houses—many times since his visit, and have looked at it from what I take to be his central point, and as I can understand, and, to a considerable extent, sympathize with the conclusion he arrived at, I may as well note down some of the characteristics of a new neighbourhood, especially if it has sprung into sudden popularity, which disagreeably qualify first impressions about it.

Let it be assumed that the locality is one which originally recommended itself by a rare combination of natural charms, albeit, in some instances, undoubtedly, the assumption would be purely one of a lively imagination. Other things than scenery can set in flow a current of population towards a given spot. A good, frequent, reliable railway service which will put the passenger down in the very centre of the district within a half or

three quarters of an hour of his leaving his office, at any hour of the day, from early morning till midnight, is, perhaps, one of the most potent of the agencies in creating a new neighbourhood. If the air be tolerably pure, the water drinkable, and the soil not absolutely boggy, a bold, speculating builder may calculate upon that agency alone to fill with occupants as many houses as he can run up. But there are some spots which have additional attractions—which a wide stretch of contiguous common, or a place of resort like the Crystal Palace, or the loveliness of the surrounding country, raises into what may be called a fancy neighbourhood, very soon after the convenience of a railway has been established, and the land has once been liberated for building purposes. The locality I shall select for my observations shall be one of the last named description, one, namely, which, in addition to its facility of access, can also boast of picturesque scenery.

Of course, with very few exceptions, all the available houses are new. The place may have had a few inhabitants long before the revolution of modern habits, and the existing facilities of locomotion, pushed it into notice. A score or two of quiet families, perhaps, had adopted it as a retreat, and had built for themselves mansions or snuggeries worthy of being called "houses." It is only, however, by a rare combination of chances that any of these falls to the choice of a new comer. Unless, therefore, you are in a position to build for yourself, you must reconcile yourself as best

you may to what may happen to have been put up for competing occupants by, for the most part, needy and greedy speculators. Two or three inferences it will always be safe to draw from the premises. The first is, that as little capital has been invested in your future habitation as possible, and that no small a proportion of that has been spent in making it showy to the eye. The second is, that *your* comfort has been throughout a very secondary consideration. And the third is, that you will have to pay a ridiculously high rent. By the end of the first summer, at latest, after you have got possession, you will have the pleasure of finding every particle of woodwork shrunk ; folding-doors which will not meet by an inch ; ordinary doors which, besides dislocating all their apparatus for fastening, give free entrance to incessant draughts of cold air ; window sashes that rattle with the slightest breeze ; stairs that creak ; wainscots that yawn ; floors every plank of which repels and is repelled by its colleague on each side of it ; and perhaps joists and rafters that seem, to you at least, to compromise your safety. Your wife will bemoan a want of cupboards ; your cook will complain that her larder opens on the dust-bin ; you will be compelled to stow away your beer with brooms and dusters under the kitchen stairs ; to forego ordering more than a couple of dozen of wine at a time, for lack of a place to keep it in ; and to hide a single load of coals in some almost inaccessible hole under the garden steps. As to the garden itself, sur-

rounded by a low wall about breast high, or, more likely, by an unpainted wooden fence, its beauty is, as yet, only in the potential mood. That portion of it nearest the house appears to have produced nothing hitherto but stains of mortar and broken brickbats, and the remainder of it is prolific of groundsel. You have got into a fancy neighbourhood, but for three or four years to come you will not, even with considerable outlay, have got rid of all the discomforts which go to balance its advantages.

Say you are approaching that happy consummation, other annoyances are in store for you. You thought the prospect from your front or your back window worth all the petty nuisances you had endured for the sake of having it always at hand. To all the intents and purposes of personal gratification, that little clump of hanging birches on the left of the foreground, that stretch of richly-wooded landscape beyond, and the distant hill on the horizon, were your own, and you had learned to watch them with as proud admiration as if you had been their proprietor. All at once you catch sight of certain ominous preparations. A strip of land between you and that charming scene has been let on a building lease. In an incredibly short time a terrace of lodging-houses, with a glaring public-house at one end of it, has sprung up, and blotted out your picture, leaving you, as far as sight is concerned, very little better off than when you lived in town.

Still there is the country to walk in—the green um-

brageous lanes, the sylvan patches, the foot-paths across the fields, the wild flowers in their season. Yes, there *is*; but how long *will* there be? Every year takes away from you some of your favourite strolling places. In vain you cry out, "Woodman, spare that tree!" Speculating builders spare nothing but their own outlay. Look at that immense brick-field, covered with millions of unbaked bricks, and dim with the everlasting smoking of half-a-dozen kilns. Ten years ago it was a green meadow, capped at its further end by hanging woods—the playground on summers' evenings of hundreds of rabbits, and traversed by one of the prettiest country lanes imaginable. It is now doing its part towards providing house accommodation for a fancy neighbourhood. You have not visited some of the choicest and most secluded spots within the compass of your daily "constitutional" since winter set in. The weather has kept you pretty closely to the highways. You seize upon the first opportunity in the spring to renew your pleasant acquaintance with these out-of-the-way nooks. You discover, to your sad surprise, that one of them, at least, perhaps more, already belongs to the past; "absent from sight, to memory dear." A broad and yet unfinished road is obliterating all your cherished pictures of rustic simplicity and natural grace, and great piles of bricks and mortar are staring with blank, inexpressive faces upon the few forlorn trees that have been left. Gradually, nay, rapidly, the district is losing nearly every one of its attractive

features ; all its old hues of beauty are departing, all its extensive prospects are being blocked out. Primitive it has already ceased to be, even in those parts which have not yet been metamorphosed. The divine calm which once enwrapped it cannot now be realized. It can even make a smoky atmosphere without help from the metropolis. Nature is yielding her place, not to Art, for it would be a desecration of the term to apply it to the architecture of suburban places, but to Manufacture. Such is the process of change to which fancy neighbourhoods are liable.

But there is another way in which these incidents rub the guilt off your gingerbread, and, I fancy, this, as much as anything, precipitated the decision of our friend F——. I may illustrate my meaning by mentioning a little occurrence which some time since fell under my own observation. There was a family removal from a very small, darksome house, abutting upon the highway in one suburb of London, to a much more spacious and imposing residence in a newly-constructed and still incomplete road in another. The children had anticipated the change, as children anticipate all changes, with eager curiosity and delight. The distance between the two houses was not so great as to be beyond a walk to the elder ones. On arriving at the new dwelling-place they were ushered into a spacious and lightsome chamber, which, it was thought, would pleasingly contrast with the low, narrow, gloomy rooms with which they had been familiar. The eldest, a girl about ten

years of age, after casting a rapid glance over the yet unfurnished room, walked to one of the windows, and silently gazed at the scene outside. It certainly was not very attractive. A rough road, a low hedge on the opposite side of it, broken by many gaps, a triangle of meadow, scattered over with building litter, and a dilapidated cow-house at its furthest extremity, made up the prospect. After she had looked awhile she burst into tears and sobs, and, upon being pressed with inquiries as to the cause of her distress, exclaimed at last, "It's so untidy!" You have always this undercurrent of dissatisfaction in a new neighbourhood. Walk where you will it is evermore in a mess. You watch the progress of this and the other building in the hope that after awhile all will be complete. Masons'-sheds, scaffold-poles, dirty hoarding, and all the too-well-known unsightlinesses which are connected with builders' work, worry your sense of order, finish, and propriety; and you grow impatient to look upon the last of them. But you never do. In every direction there is the same muddle. You never can gratify your taste for completeness, never witness a final clearing up, never enjoy a consciousness of repose. The district may be pretty enough, even after its most characteristic features have been spoiled; but if it be always "untidy," as, sooth to say, it mostly is in every quarter of it, the impression it makes upon your fancy is irritating rather than agreeable. I remember going down, about twenty years ago, to spend a fortnight at Herne Bay. It had

suddenly sprung into notoriety, as a watering-place, two or three years previously, and had been egregiously over-built. Whole rows of carcasses of houses exhibited on every side the ruin of their projectors, and oppressed the spirits of visitors like troops of unkempt, ragged mendicants. I thought if ever a man were intent upon committing suicide, he should go down to that "waste howling wilderness" of brick carcasses, and do it there with all the appropriate accessories.

There is one other drawback to these fancy neighbourhoods. Their population is as migratory as their external aspect is shifting. They are frequently *called* villages, but they are not in the least *like* them. In some respects this is an advantage; in others not. They scarcely admit of gossip and scandal; but, on the other hand, they are very unfavourable *habitats* for a social circle. People come to them and go from them with very much the same feeling as they would enter or quit an Eastern caravanserai, or an American hotel. They contain but few "houses" in the consecrated sense of that word. To the great majority of the thriving men of business who locate their families in them, and sleep in them, they are not regarded in the same light as the settled abode of the retired merchant, professional man, or tradesman. They are more frequently looked upon as "a lodge in a garden of cucumbers," very convenient, possibly pleasant, good for the children whilst they are growing up, but not precisely the places in

which to contemplate spending the remnant of one's days when business shall be finally relinquished. They are not quiet enough for that. Beyond one's own door they offer but few advantages, either for intellectual culture or for the nourishment or discipline of the heart. They present no nucleus about which social affections may gather. They are without unity, and, consequently, without any distinctiveness of character. They display no public spirit, for the simple reason that, as neighbourhoods, they have none to display. There is no cement to bind into coherence the several parts. They abound with snobs. They see a good deal of fast living, and the ostentation of wealth; but they develop nothing of the higher nature, and lack most of the agencies for elevation and refinement of thoroughly organized communities.

Fancy neighbourhoods typify very aptly the character of the age—showy, unsolid, incomplete, full of compromise, marked by transition, devoid of high purpose. Whether it will exhibit more unity to our far-off posterity than it does to us, is a fair question; probably it will. Meanwhile, it is not quite so agreeable as, doubtless, it is inevitable. The removal of old landmarks, the breaking-up of long-cherished associations, the innovation upon customary habits, the unsettlement of ancient faiths, the precocious growth of new scientific, philosophical, and religious theories, may be, in the end, and no doubt will be, of vast benefit to the human race of

the future, but they sadly disquiet the present generation. 'Tis an age of perpetual motion, of cutting down, of throwing open, of reconstruction, of scaffolding and ladders, of spoiling old things and running up new ones, of unrest, muddle, and mess. Perhaps all ages have seemed so more or less to those who lived in them; but our own really appears to transcend them all in this respect. From the victory of Waterloo down to the present date, a period of fifty years, this kingdom, to say nothing of the rest of the world, has undergone a more rapid succession of what may be truly described as revolutionary changes than probably in any five hundred years of its previous history. And the most important of them have been internal changes—changes in the disposition of integral atoms and of vital forces. Of course they are precedent to something better than themselves, better than the old conditions which they have so largely disturbed. When the seething mixture has been set to cool, and the scum rises to the top and is removed, the result may be expected to be well worth the process. But it requires strong confidence in the good to come, and in Him who brings good out of evil, to accept the process as the best possible, if not the most congenial with our tastes. On the whole, fancy neighbourhoods, whether literal or figurative, are usually temporary retreats from drudgery, and stepping-stones to a more perfect repose, and may be used as the former with an eye to the latter. They have their conve-

niences, but to contemplative, susceptible, and richly cultured minds, they have even more annoyances. I am not, on reflection, astonished that F—— preferred to settle down in a place where he could, at any rate, indulge the expectation of a quiet life.



XI.

ROADSIDE ADVENTURE.

WHAT may be the case with newspaper editors in general, I have not the means of knowing ; but, as to myself, it may be stated that my occupation makes me heir to one disadvantage which never lessens, and that is the extreme difficulty of getting away from it at intervals. As far as recollection serves me, a whole month's cessation from weekly work is a release which I have enjoyed but twice in two dozen years. I go from home, it is true, in the summer or autumn of most years for a change of scene ; but my duties go with me. Real vacation rambles, therefore, except such as may be comprised within two or three clear days, date a long way back in my history—for to talk of a vacation which does not leave the mind empty of its every-day cares and obligations is to perpetrate a misnomer—but they are looked back upon now with all the more interest. Very likely

“ 'Tis distance lends enchantment to the view ; ”

at any rate, they live in one's memory as little bits of experience which are occasionally reviewed with ever increasing pleasure as they recede into the past.

As has been somewhere hinted already, I was a tolerably good pedestrian. Five-and-twenty miles a day for three or four days successively did not in prospect daunt me, nor in effect knock me up. North Wales and the Scottish Highlands were the favourite scenes of my excursions, at that time neither of them so readily accessible, nor so thronged with tourists, as now. Knapsack on back, and stick in hand, I managed, in some half-dozen tours, to see and enjoy, as only pedestrians can, if not all that is most worth seeing in each, yet nearly all that the public know anything about. My mode of travel left me at liberty to deviate from the beaten track—a liberty of which I was not backward to avail myself whenever it was possible. These vacation rambles amid picturesque and sometimes romantic scenery, and over historical ground, always answered the main purposes for which they were taken—the laying-in of a plentiful stock of health and spirits for the work of the ensuing eleven months of the year, and also of a bundle of choice recollections for the rest of life. But in one particular they were disappointing. With the inexperience of youth, and with a temperament too sanguine to anticipate anything worse than a brief inconvenience, I longed for a spice of personal adventure. Prior to starting I had read a good many Guide Books of the country to be visited, and all of them abounded with exciting descriptions of hazardous places to be passed, or dangers to be encountered, and with thrilling anecdotes of hair's-breadth escapes; and

the expectation they quickened of something bearing a family likeness to what I had read gave a relish to my projects. In reality, however, I never found what I was looking for.

Nevertheless, young people are seldom content when out on excursions of this kind to finish their programme without a dash or two of the melodramatic, and if the bare prosaic facts do not supply them with the material they are in search of, imagination is often ready, as well as competent, to make up for the deficiency. Such, at least, was my experience in the course of my first pedestrian tour. On that occasion, long and eagerly looked forward to, and still memorable, I went into North Wales. It had never struck me that a companion would be desirable ; and, to confess the truth, I had a notion that for a full appreciation of the novel features of Nature upon which I was about to gaze, it would be better to be alone. I soon discovered my mistake, but not before it had become too late to rectify it. In the daytime and whilst walking I did pretty well ; but when the day's work was over, and I found it expedient to give some indulgence to my wearied limbs, and "take mine ease in mine inn," I suffered severe attacks of home sickness. I wanted some one with whom to compare notes and to share my feelings, and, in default of finding what I wanted, depression of spirits, the consequence partly of fatigue, partly of solitude, made my evenings long and miserable, opened the door to thoughts of my own fireside, and drove me

off to bed at ridiculously early hours to seek in sleep a refuge from my wretchedness. But this unbroken solitariness, no doubt, predisposed me to surround myself with a haze of romantic anticipations, seen through which very ordinary occurrences assumed extraordinary hues and forms.

It was in a rather dreamy but not unpleasant mood that I started one morning from Tan-y-Bwlch, with the intention of seeing a noted waterfall, whose name I forget, lying somewhere off the road to the left, and then getting on to Dolgelly for the night. Whilst returning to the turnpike road from this episodic excursion, through a thick plantation, now (about the middle of May) in the freshness of its beauty, I was suddenly seized with a pain in my instep which rendered walking a very torturing operation. I was, as I judged, about eight miles from my destination, and the day was drawing towards evening. I concluded that it would be utterly impossible for me to reach Dolgelly that night, and limped on in hope of lighting upon some roadside public-house or even beer-shop, where I might either procure means of conveyance, or—for I was not sanguine enough to expect a bed—get permission to pass the night under shelter at least. A mason or quarryman whom I met on the road made my heart glad when, in reply to an anxious inquiry on my part, whether there was any house of refreshment between us and Dolgelly, he informed me in Welsh-accentuated English that I should reach one within less than a mile from where we

stood. I succeeded in hobbling on till I reached it, and found it a mere drinking-place, the single, not-very-capacious room of which, as it was Saturday evening, was crowded with labourers smoking, boosing, and carrying on five or six separate sets of dialogue in a tongue not one word of which I understood, and in tones too uniformly loud to be called emphatic. The place certainly presented a rude interior, and the company was quite in keeping with it. A middle-aged swarthy woman came forward as landlady when I entered, and stood in waiting attitude to receive my orders.

"Is there any one here," I asked, "going to Dolgelly to-night with a cart or carriage of any sort, who can take me with him, as I have lamed myself and cannot get on?" The woman plainly did not understand me, and looking round towards a quiet, pleasant-faced man at the other end of the room, said something in Welsh, to which he made answer in the same language; after which she turned to me and said, "Not one, sir, indeed." "Can I sleep here, if it be only on one of these benches?" A similar interchange of speech between the landlady and the fore-mentioned guest, was followed by an announcement made civilly enough, "No, indeed, sir." "Then I don't know what I shall do," I said, speaking to myself, and sitting down on a settle from which the former occupants had removed to make room for me; "Is there no farm-house in the neighbourhood where

a horse might be got at any price ? ” Once more the same man addressed her in Welsh, and she immediately afterwards replied, “No, indeed, sir.” Nothing was left me but to take an hour’s rest, lay up my lame foot, and hope against hope that I should be able to get along. So, by way of paying shot to the house, I ordered some ale, took out my short travelling pipe and filled it, and began to smoke and ruminate.

Presently, our friend on the other side of the room got up, and making his way to the narrow deal table in front of me, said : “I am going to Dolgelly to-night, sir ; I will walk with you every step of the way ; yes, indeed, sir.” “But you see,” said I, finding that the man could speak English, “I cannot walk—I have fallen lame—it will be impossible for me to get over six or seven miles of ground to-night.” I then made the same inquiries of him which I had done of the landlady, and received precisely the same answers, which, indeed, it was he who had previously dictated. “Well,” I said, “there seems to be no alternative ; I must try it.” “Indeed, I will help you, sir, all the way to Dolgelly ; yes, indeed, sir,” said the man in a kindly tone. There was a settled expression in his face of open-heartedness and gentleness ; so I accepted his offer with thanks, ordered him a glass of ale, handed him some tobacco from my own box, and waited until I should receive from him a summons to move.

He let me rest about an hour, and then asked me to try my lame foot, as it was full time to be going. I

did so, and, greatly to my surprise, found I could use it without intolerable pain. The reckoning paid, I went out, taking my knapsack and stick with me. Most of the labourers had previously departed ; but when I got into the road, I noticed my nice-looking friend in close conversation with another whose expression did not inspire me with the same confidence. He was a coarse-looking man, with shaggy red hair, a gloomy cast of countenance, and a horrible squint of one eye, which gave him a very forbidding look. "This person will go with us part of the way," said my accepted companion. "All right," said I, with a brisk air, determined not to let my manner suggest that I entertained the smallest misgiving. "Give me your things," he said : "I will carry them for you." "Thank you," I replied, in as natural a tone as I could command, and instantly handed over to him my knapsack, which, as it contained nothing of any value, I thought it would be better, if they turned out to be rogues, that they should make off with, than abuse me to get possession of it. He took it, threw it across his shoulders, rejoined his companion, and the two walked on.

The sun had set, and, notwithstanding a bright moon, the aspect of the country was, to my fancy at least, sombre to solemnity. Our road seemed to have been cut along the face of a huge hill, with the scarped rock on the right hand, and a steep, uncultivated slope on the left. Above the scarp a belt of wood concealed from view the upper part of the hill, and threw across

the road every now and then, according to the point of the compass towards which it bore, broad patches of dark shade. Directly opposite to us, on the left hand, and, as I calculated, at the distance of from three-quarters of a mile to a mile and a half, another majestic hill threw its uneven ridge high into the sky. The valley, or gorge, formed by the two, although not precipitous on either side, was somewhat sudden in its descent ; and at the bottom of it, but seemingly very deep down, gleamed the white, tortuous line of the river. Following my two guides at a distance of about a dozen yards, I began to grow somewhat excited. Here, certainly, I thought, was an appropriate locality, and this the fitting time, for robbery, violence—perhaps murder. I was awed, but, in the preponderant belief that no harm would ensue, my awe never rose into terror. Still I kept my eyes intently fixed on the two figures before me, and saw them, in frequent brief pauses in their talk with each other, look at me simultaneously, and then resume their walk and conversation. We had proceeded thus for the best part of an hour, when my good-looking friend, quitting his companion, turned back and joined me. “How is your foot ?” he asked. “Much better than I expected,” I replied ; “but hardly equal, I am afraid, to the whole distance. How much farther have we to go ?” “The road is about five miles from here,” he said ; then, changing the topic abruptly, he asked, “Don’t you feel lonely ?” “Well, I do, rather,” I confessed. “I thought you

would, indeed, sir ; but the other man does not understand English, and I thought it would be tiresome to you to hear us talking in Welsh." To which remark I made no reply, but thought within myself that the reason might have been a good one for not bringing his sinister-looking mate along with him.

We had not gone many paces further when I heard a shrill whistle, loud and long, which hein advance of us piped down into the valley. We stopped. "What is that?" I inquired, as a thrill ran down my spine, and, I doubt not, the blood forsook my cheeks. "Oh, you will see presently," he rejoined. "Look down there," he continued, pointing down to the river. "Do you see that dark spot on the other side?" It seemed like an old barn or hovel. As we peered through the evening haze and the moonlight, another whistle, louder, if possible, and shriller than before, was blown down into the depths by the other man. Then another pause, and he shouted something in Welsh to his companion. "Do you see, sir?" asked the latter, pointing again to the same quarter. I looked for a minute, and at last made out the figure of a man, who, issuing from the shade of the said hovel, planted himself in the full light of the moon, and whistled up in reply. Another spurt of Welsh from our shaggy, cross-eyed friend in front, who then plunged down the slope towards the river. "Follow me, sir," said my friend, and took the same course. What could I do but obey? It was a severe trial to my poor foot, but, to do my

companion justice, he was very considerate and tender, lifted me down the more awkward places, and rendered me most efficient assistance in our descent. We did not make for the part of the river-bank immediately opposite the hovel, but for a spot lower down the stream, where the moon shimmered brilliantly on a broad, untroubled sheet of water, which we were not long in reaching, and where we found the unwelcome owner of the mistrustful physiognomy.

On the other side of the stream the man whom we had seen from above had just reached the opposite bank as we got down, carrying a coracle—a broad basket of wicker-work covered with skin. He carefully placed it in the water, stepped into it, and, with a spade, or what looked like one, paddled himself across. When he had reached our bank there was a brief interchange of short sentences in Welsh, and then he of the sinister countenance got into the frail boat, and was paddled to the other side by the old man. My spirits rapidly rose on seeing him depart, and I hoped we should see no more of him. It was the old man, however, and not he, who got out on the farther bank, and walked away, while mine enemy returned with the coracle. As he was nearing our side, my companion asked me, “Shall you be afraid, sir?” “Afraid of what?” I inquired. “To go across in the boat,” he said. “What am I to cross for?” I somewhat nervously asked. “It is a short way to Dolgelly, sir,” he answered; “we shall go across the river here, and through the wood up

there, and over the hill, and then we shall go down into Dolgelly. I know every step of the way. It is three miles shorter than the road by the river." "Oh," I exclaimed, considerably relieved, "to save three miles walking to-night, I am ready to go anywhere." So I got into the basket with the whistler, crouched down, and was silently and safely carried across. Then the man went back for his companion, brought him over, drew the coracle out of the water, hung it on his head over his back, jerked out something gruff which I could not understand, and walked away towards the cottage.

I was now quite satisfied, notwithstanding the prospect of the wood ahead through which we had to pass. My companion grew communicative. The old man, he told me, was his work-mate's father, and lived with him in the cottage on the river-side. It was a fortunate thing for me that the son was in the beer-shop when I called, as there was no other way of crossing the river but in his coracle, and, when my distress was explained to him, he had immediately suggested to my volunteer guide this way of shortening my walk. As we drew near to Dolgelly, my friend told me he had taken pity on me when he noticed the unfortunate plight I was in—that he had been to England when he was a young man to do harvest-work—that he had met with people who treated him with exceeding kindness—and that it made such an impression on him that he had resolved to evince his gratitude by repaying it to Englishmen in

his own country. We soon descended into the road on the opposite side of the town to that by which I should have entered but for my good fortune. At the toll-gate, the man pointed to a neat cottage, and said, "That's where I live." "Then don't go any farther," I said. "There's no need—I see the town;" and I began to feel for my purse. "I said I will go with you every step of the way—and I will; yes, indeed, sir." The good fellow kept his word, saw me into my hotel, took my card to the Post Office, and fetched my letters for me, and resolutely, almost angrily, refused to accept any guerdon for his pains.

The above was, perhaps, the nearest approach to the kind of adventure I had anticipated when I left home; to wit, the passing through scenes in which the excitement of personal peril would be associated in my recollection with the wild and romantic features of the country through which I travelled. It will be evident enough to the reader that the peril was an element supplied solely by my own imagination. Otherwise, nothing could have been more commonplace than the actual incidents that befel me, with the single exception, perhaps, of the unselfish conduct of my guides; for even "the ruffian" of the plot which fancy had suggested to me, when he had done his part towards assisting me, walked off without giving me an opportunity of offering him remuneration. Perhaps, if the whole truth were known, a great many roadside adventures would be found to be nothing more than a few simple occurrences,

fused by the heat of imagination into a blood-stirring story.

A year or two afterwards I encountered a real danger ; but as my fancy was asleep, I got safely through it before I had time to recognise it, at least in its full proportions. In company with two companions and a young guide, I had ascended Ben Lomond overnight from Rowardennan, for the purpose of witnessing sunrise from the summit of the mountain. Arrived thither, we could not see ten yards before us, although we waited for a couple of hours. Our plan included a descent to a Ferry nearly opposite Tarbet, where we had arranged to breakfast. The dense mist which closed in our view during the whole time we were on the mountain-top, extended downwards to its waist, and we found some difficulty, on our way down, in keeping one another in sight. We had been given to expect a more difficult path than the common one by which we had ascended ; but we had not prepared ourselves for the amount of serious and toilsome scrambling which we had to do. This circumstance, and the frequent hesitations of our guide, made us suspect he had missed his way. The poor boy—for he was but an overgrown boy—indignantly repelled our suspicions until matters came to that pass that he could not deny their justice. Presently, he abruptly pulled up, and warned us not to advance further. There we were, on the very brink of a sheer precipice, the depth of which was hidden from us by a seething, whirling, impenetrable sea of

white mist, suggestive of the thought that the *genius loci* was busy boiling vapour in a huge cauldron. Of course our guide was obliged to confess that he had got off the track, and, by way of excusing himself, though not of re-assuring us, he informed us that he had never been that way but once before in his life. The lad, however, knew the general direction in which safety was to be sought. We retraced our steps for a considerable distance, then struck off in a line which would put a wide space between us and the precipice, and afterwards cautiously resumed our descent. In less than a quarter of an hour we emerged from the cloud, and, having ascertained our whereabouts, managed once more to come across the path ordinarily used by the guides. We got down safely, were rowed across the lake by two women, and just reached our hotel at Tarbet in time to get shelter from one of the most magnificent and awe-inspiring thunder-storms I have ever witnessed. But in this case the danger was not realized until we had got beyond it. We had neither time nor opportunity to give scope to imagination, otherwise the facts might have supplied it with abundant material. Lost on Ben Lomond with such a terrific storm gathering above our heads, might have suggested to fancy a thrilling passage of mountain adventure—only we didn't happen to think of it. The excitement—such as there was—came too late. We could not elevate our position into the heroic; we could only feel thankful that, without being aware of its proximity, we had escaped a great danger.

One other incident I will take leave to mention under the head of "Roadside Adventure," in which imagination played no part, nor, indeed, was its character such as to require the least aid from the creative powers of the mind to give it full effect. This, also, is connected with the locality of Ben Lomond. A much-loved friend, now no more, and his nephew, then a stripling, joined me in ascending the mountain one Saturday afternoon, with the intention of finding our way down to the village of Aberfoil, in which quiet nook we purposed spending the Sunday. As the weather was all we could wish, and this was my third ascent, we dispensed with the service, as well as the nuisance, of a guide. We encountered no difficulty beyond slight fatigue in making our way up; but we took with us no provisions. We had lunched but lightly at the hotel below, and we calculated upon reaching our destination in time for a late dinner. We spent about an hour and a half on the summit of the mountain, where the air was delicious, drinking in the glory of the unrivalled panorama outspread beneath and around us. Then, consulting a good map we had with us, and comparing it closely with the features of the mountain-side by which we were to descend, we made out the successive points which we were to keep in view in order to strike the road to Aberfoil without being obliged to cross a stream on our way down. This done, we set off in high spirits. Our route had been well chosen. We had, it is true, some rough ground to go over,

where hands and knees as well as feet found full employment ; but before sunset we had reached the road leading to Aberfoil. We had then, however, four or five miles to walk. Already we had put about half this distance behind us, when the youth complained of being faint. Hard and protracted exertion and want of food had been too much for him. We procured for him a little water, which somewhat restored him, but it was evident that he must have something to eat before he could proceed to the journey's end. Seeing this, I walked briskly forward, intending to beg a slice of bread at a farm-house which, a little farther on, stood on the right of the road. Fortunately, as I came up to the gate, a stout, good-tempered looking man, whom I took to be the owner of the premises, was just coming out. I told him my story, and asked him to give our young companion a mouthful of any food that might be nearest at hand, to sustain his sinking strength until we should reach the hotel. " Yes, surely," he said ; " come away." I did not understand that this was an invitation to follow him, and therefore stepped back into the road and beckoned my companions. " This good man," I said to the youth, when they had reached the gate, " will give you something to eat, and meanwhile we will wait for you here." " Come away, come away, all of you," said the host, and we followed him to the house, expecting such refreshment as an ordinary Scotch farm-house might yield. He led us into a decent hall, opened a door on his right hand, and ushered us into a

spacious dining-room—spacious, I mean, as compared with our expectations—where the state of the table indicated that a company of eight or ten persons had previously dined, and had just finished their dessert. “Gentlemen,” he said politely, addressing two of his associates who still lingered over their wine, “I have brought you these guests who have just come over the mountain and are famished; you will not object to my giving them some dinner.” The gentlemen courteously intimated their pleasure at seeing us, and our portly host rang the bell. “Now, Maggie,” he said as soon as a respectable-looking old lady entered the room in answer to the summons, “these gentlemen have had a hard day’s work, and are starved. Put on the table the best you have got. You see,” said he, turning to us, “not expecting the honour of your company, we dined two hours ago. But I dare say,” he continued, as the housekeeper left the room, “the gudewife will find you something that you can eat.” Maggie soon spread a cloth at one end of the table, and placed upon it a substantial “cold collation,” including a considerable variety of dishes—beef, fowls, ham, pastry, and several little knick-knacks for spoiled appetites. Meanwhile, the other gentlemen slipped out of the room. Our hospitable host took his seat at the end of the table, and did the honours with as much cordiality as if we had been old friends.

Before we had quite finished our repast, which could not have been better nor better served had it been

ordered at a first-rate hotel, another gentleman put his head in at the door, and, seeing strangers, hastily withdrew. "Do you know that gentleman?" asked our host. We could not say that we did. "He is Sheridan Knowles," said he, "down here with some friends of his for a few days' fishing." Sheridan Knowles! Well, he had lectured on "The Drama" about a month before in the town where we were residing, but, for some reason or other, I had been disappointed in my intention of hearing him. "Would you like to be introduced?" inquired our host. We said it would give us an additional and very unexpected pleasure. "Then excuse me for a few moments," he said, and left the room. Shortly he returned with Sheridan Knowles, whom he formally introduced. We had an agreeable chat for a few minutes, and four or five other gentlemen dropped one by one into the room. "Eh! Sirs," exclaimed our good-humoured host, "this is a chance meeting that ought to be celebrated." Thereupon he ordered some of the "old port," and called upon Mr. Sheridan Knowles for a toast, who, in a short, graceful speech, gave "Our stranger guests." It fell to my lot to return thanks, which I concluded by proposing, as a second toast, "Mr. Sheridan Knowles." This little ceremony over, we fell into general conversation, in the course of which we intimated our intention of spending the morrow at Aberfoil. "Have you secured your beds?" our host inquired. "We have not," we

replied. "There is only one small hotel in the place," he replied, "and I doubt you may find some difficulty; but we are just sending up there, and I will tell the lad to say you are coming." It was getting dark when we took our leave of the party who had given us such kind entertainment, but we were not long in reaching the hotel. We found we could be accommodated—in fact, the landlady informed us that the lad who had been sent forward had brought a message that, if she had not sufficient accommodation for us, two of the fishing party who had slept there during their stay would give up their beds whilst we remained. We retired to rest with a more appreciative estimate of human nature than we had previously entertained.

My experience of "*Roadside Adventure*" has been just the opposite to that which my study of Guide Books had led me to expect. Unlooked-for generosity constitutes the staple of it. In Wales, in Scotland, in France, in Germany, and in Switzerland, the incidents that have come upon me by surprise have, with very trifling exceptions, been such as have brought out in strong relief the kindlier phases of our common nature. They are among my choicest reminiscences. Of course I might, if I had given the matter due thought, have anticipated as much. My rambles have never extended beyond the pale of civilization, and I was not warranted in foreshadowing a likelihood of events inconsistent with it. As to the perils to be encountered in different places, I have usually found them wonderfully exagge-

rated by graphic descriptions of them. Some of them might, perhaps, present themselves to me now, if I were called to face them, in a more formidable light ; but, generally speaking, as a young man blessed with a good share of health and animal spirits, I saw in them nothing to make my heart beat more quickly. I was not constitutionally disposed to forecast for myself a threatening horoscope ; and, unless I was out of sorts, I seldom looked out for misfortunes, “ Sufficient unto the day was the evil thereof.” Hence my roadside adventures have been not only rare, but chiefly of the agreeable kind, and when real danger has been close at hand, as has sometimes been the case, I have only recognised the back of it when it was departing. For all which I hope I am truly grateful.



XII.

MOUNTAIN SCENERY.

It is not necessary to be a member of the Alpine Club in order to become qualified for the enjoyment of mountain scenery. Not that any one who appreciates its teaching can disparage any help by which he may receive it in its greater fulness and variety. To have graduated as a mountaineer so far as to have entitled himself by his achievements to the recognition of that famous body, is what no man who loves mountains will esteem a light thing. Still, as it is not every one, even of those who have reached the summit of Mont Blanc, who is able to commune with the spirit that expresses itself by any means of glacier, pass, and peak, so it is not by any means impossible for those who are but slightly acquainted with the *arcana* of Alpine lore to interpret some of the most impressive utterances of these lofty preceptors. A great deal is revealed, even to such as have never got beyond the horn-book of experience in this matter; and true sentiment may be awakened in susceptible bosoms by converse with the rudimentary instruction to be picked up on the mountains of our own native isle.

It may be questioned, indeed, whether a better insight into what may be described as the soul of mountain scenery, and a closer sympathy with it, may not be obtained from miniature than from grander ranges—from what may be seen with little personal risk than from that which exacts frequent exposure to imminent peril. Vastness, it is true, is one of the elementary conditions indispensable to mountain expression ; but vastness is comparative, and must bear some proportion to the reach of our senses in order to produce its highest effect. Mountains may be on a scale of magnitude so colossal as to conceal their most striking characteristics from human sight, and to disclose even their heights only to far distant spectators. You cannot grow familiar with them. You cannot see enough of them at one view to enable your mind to comprehend their meaning. You cannot study their moods. You cannot watch the ever-varying play of expression upon them. You cannot contrast them with the plains from which they uplift their immeasurable bulk. Communion with them, in any intelligible sense of the word, is as impossible as communion would be with an archangel who should blind you with excess of light. We can get on far better with forms falling within the compass of our limited powers. The Swiss mountains are gigantic enough to satisfy all that the mind craves from this order of created works. Our own are petty in comparison. Yet from our own we may get distincter impressions

in most respects than from the Alps, as we may learn more of the instincts and habits of a lion from the cubs, with which we may play, than from the dam, which we fear to approach.

For adventure, of course, the Alps or the Pyrennees ranges throw our domestic ones into the shade ; but it is not of adventure that I am speaking, but rather of the revelations which mountains can make to the mind, of their power to awaken sentiment—ay, even to inspire affection—of what they can do towards widening our conceptions, touching our sensibilities, educating our intellect, elevating and purifying our inner man. Herein lies the secret of that spell which they can breathe over us. This is the key to the glorious enjoyment they impart. I do not lose sight of the physical exhilaration commonly attendant on mountain expeditions. Delicious as it is, however, it contributes but a small proportion to the pleasurable excitement which mountains are capable of stirring in our mental and moral nature.

The writer will never forget the sensations which overpowered him on his first sight of a mountain. Starting from Caernarvon for the Llanberis Pass at five in the morning on a fine May day, and finding some difficulty in walking off the combined effect of the lingering fatigue of a preceding march, a heavy cold caught by sleeping a night or two before in a damp bed, and bilious depression superinduced by a glass of hot rum and milk, which his landlady had pressed upon

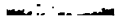
him before he retired to rest as an infallible remedy for his incipient ailment, he was not in the best possible mood for enjoying the beauties of nature. But youth and novelty have a wonderful power of restoring elasticity to the animal spirits. He had already begun to shake off from his limbs the sense of weariness, and from his mind the vague feeling of gloom, with which he had set out on his solitary way, when a turn of the road brought him within sight of Snowdon, in what may be called his morning *dishabille*. The head of the mountain was veiled in cloud, which hung down in very irregular folds over the shoulder. Here and there a bright patch of snow gleamed like a jewel through the border of the vapoury veil, while over the outline of the near side a mass of cloud threw a dark shade, which here and there deepened into mystery and awe. The sudden and violent tumult of emotions raised by that sight, his first introduction to mountain scenery, will never be forgotten. Till then, he had bewailed his want of a companion; but at that moment he was thankful that he was alone.

Yes! I confess that my first impression differed, not so much in degree as in kind, from what I had anticipated. I stood spell-stricken for awhile, but the fascination was of a dreamy, spiritual character, as if I had been ushered unexpectedly into the presence of a mighty, living, observant power. My sentiment of veneration was stirred as it had never been stirred before by any visible object. With the sea I became

acquainted in my childhood ; and even the sea, unless caught sight of for the first time under special conditions, and from a favourable spot for observation, does not usually disclose the grandeur of its might at a first interview. As I stood gazing at that immense bulk, I could not dissociate it in my mind from a being instinct with life. The impulse was strong within me to bow the head—nay, more—to prostrate myself upon the earth, and do worshipful homage. Awe overspread all my faculties. Had I spoken, it would have been in direct address to the sublime form which rather appeared to me to come out of the depths of the heavens, than to have been built up upon an earthly foundation. I should hardly have been surprised if it had faded from before my eyes, and left the space which it now filled vacant, so much more did it resemble spirit than matter to my apprehension. It loomed upon me as an awful mystery wrought “of such stuff” as dreams are made of—an “unsubstantial pageant” which would hardly have violated the texture of my impressions had it suddenly disappeared.

It is singular, but it is nevertheless true, that the most transparent and dream-like pictures are offered to the eye by the hugest and most solid aggregations of matter. In certain conditions of the atmosphere—not uncommon nor unfrequently met with—a group of mountains will strike one as the most ethereal and spiritualized scene on which it is permitted us to look on this side heaven. Matter in its most fixed and pon-

derous forms seems to have parted with all its grossness, and to become the most refined expression of spirit. It assumes all the softness, all the changeableness, all the unreality, of a dissolving view. It looks as if a breath of wind might blow it all away. The banks of clouds which rest upon the horizon on a summer's evening, and which catch golden tinges from the setting sun, scarcely exhibit such a gauzy or visionary aspect. The thin bluish haze which rises from the valleys and interposes itself between outline and outline; the incessant play of light and shade upon irregular surfaces; the imperceptible gradations of colour; the gentle melting of every line of form into the rest of the picture, and the silent tranquillity which pervades the whole, make an impression even on the dulllest fancy more closely approaching what the French call *spirituel* than is made by any other sight I have ever seen. I was especially struck with this one morning while looking along the valley of Chamouni from the summit of the Col de Balme. At first the mountains on either side were wrapped in impenetrable mists; suddenly, however, a breeze swept through the valley and rent an immense reef in the curtain of vapour, disclosing, in dark and gloomy hues, the gigantic forms of the mountains right and left of me, from their feet in the valley far upwards, but still leaving undisturbed the fleecy drapery which enveloped their crests. In the far distance appeared the head of Mont Blanc, white, glistening, and as if translucent, thrown into high relief by the



deep blue sky beyond it. Never before, never since, have I gazed upon a spectacle of such unearthly magnificence. My thoughts instantly reverted to Bunyan's pilgrims looking from the Delectable Mountains at the gate of the Eternal City. All seemed so ethereal, so evanescent, so like a gorgeous dream, as to constitute to one's immediate consciousness rather an object of faith than of sight—an illusion which the closing in of the mists after the lapse of a few minutes, and the complete obliteration of the entire prospect, tended to confirm.

One can quite understand the feeling to which not a few people have given utterance that they would not prefer to live in a mountainous district. Persons born and reared in the midst of such scenery get accustomed to the weirdness of its aspects, and grow to love it; but it is difficult for lowlanders to get rid of a sort of shadowy notion that they are imprisoned in valleys and overlooked by giants. Is it due to idiosyncrasy, or to the operation of some general law upon the imagination, that, to the apprehension of so many, mountains so instantaneously and invariably clothe themselves in personal attributes and characteristics? We think of them, we talk of them, as sentient beings—as moved by, and exhibiting human caprices, moods, passions, will. They are regarded as huge embodiments of spirit akin to our own. They seem to have their seasons of grief, of joy, of tenderness, of grim humour, of laughter, of devout adoration and thanksgiving.

They can express all that a man's soul wishes to express. Their "songs without words" are as full of meaning and as intelligible as Mendelssohn's. It is not only true that we *can* commune with mountains, but that we cannot help doing so. They speak to us in tones that will make themselves heard, however indifferent we may try to be. Moreover, each one, as it becomes more familiar, tells us its own story, and preserves its own individuality. With the exception of the ocean, there is no other object of the physical creation that so irresistibly asserts for itself a *quasi* personality. Perhaps this is one reason among others why people who thoroughly enjoy an occasional visit to a land of mountains may yet be disinclined to a permanent residence therein. Mountains represent both ideas and emotions on too grand a scale for them. They get, after awhile, to feel oppressed by them. The result is much the same as living in the same house with persons vastly above them in social rank or intellectual strength. It makes them feel little in their own eyes. An indefinable sense of constraint creeps over their spirits, and when, after a month or six weeks' sojourn up among "the everlasting hills," they get fairly away from them on their journey home, they feel positively relieved, as if they had regained a portion of their personal freedom.

I have said that in mountainous regions a feeling is borne in upon us that we are imprisoned. An abrupt limitation of space has mostly a cramping effect upon

the mind. For my own part, I crave a clear outlook beyond the horizon, deprived of which my thinking powers appear to be stifled. Imagination, so far as my own experience is concerned, resents all semblance of being barred in. For me, a mountain summit has a glory far beyond that of the panorama it discloses. I breathe all the more freely and deeply its pure atmosphere, because I seem to have got above all external limitations. On the other hand, a mountain pass, walled up to heaven on either side, shuts in my thoughts. My fancy finds an almost invincible difficulty in realizing the fact that beyond and on the other side of those impending crags which rear themselves into the clouds, any known regions, any human interests, can exist. For the time being, and to present consciousness, the narrow valley through which I wend my way, sparkling, as it may, with objects of life and forms of fantastic beauty, is but a spacious prison, the outer walls of which may border, for aught I know, upon vacancy and chaos. To dwell there would be anything but agreeable. My thoughts and sympathies, I expect, would take an ever-deepening tinge of superstition.

More than in any other kind of scenery, the excursionist in a mountainous district needs company. It is a mistake to go alone. Doubtless there are men of high poetic feeling who are never less affected with a sense of solitude than when wandering alone among mountain ranges. But ordinary mortals, as are most

of us, will usually find the intensity of loneliness too much for even the most elastic animal spirits. A cheerful and congenial comrade presents just the kind of relief which the solemn impressions made by surrounding objects imperatively require. There will be many a day's distance to be got over by a tourist in such regions which will need to be shortened by the pleasant guile of a merry heart. Nothing, perhaps, puts the spirits to a severer test than a lengthened spell of monotonous grandeur. Some people, I suspect, lose the sanitary advantage of mountain travel owing to the too continuous and protracted strain of the scenery upon their minds. We were not made for uninterrupted converse with the sublime, and we enjoy most all that is most enjoyable in these districts when we can have intervals of gamesome rest for the attention.

Mountain scenery, especially in the case of those who only occasionally visit it, has a rare power of moral purification. It reveals the more trashy part of ourselves to ourselves with vivid and startling distinctness. It soon levels us to our true dimensions, and takes the starch out of our pride. I should like to see the man who can feel great in the presence of a majestic mountain pile. Moreover, is there not behind all mountain scenery a sort of dimly disclosed revelation of the Infinite mind? The Majesty of Heaven seems by this medium to approach us more closely, more visibly, and to make a more effective appeal to our reverence, than by any other material one. We cannot easily shake off

the sense of His almightiness, nor put ourselves in thought beyond His reach. Our miserably puny conceptions of Him immensely expand, and the illustrations of His power interblend with illustrations of His love. Mountains have a rudimentary gospel to preach to us, and they who have listened to it are better qualified to receive that higher Gospel which God has expressed to us in a human life and career. So that in another sense besides the more obvious one, the saying of our Lord is true, "God is able even of these stones to raise up children to Abraham." There is no form of matter so great or so inert that He cannot make subservient to high spiritual ends whensoever it may please Him.



XIII.

CHILDREN.

BLESS their young hearts ! Children, wherever they come across you, wonderfully freshen you up. But their name is Legion,—past all doubt their number is great. “ Whene’er I take my walks abroad ” children, I should say, make up a decided majority of the human forms of life that come under my notice. There are certain intervals during most days of the week when, in our suburban districts, and, I suppose, in most others, the streets, roads, lanes, by-ways, yield up a large proportion of them to the nursery and the school-room ; but such intervals are short, and the exceptions to the rule are by no means rare ; so that if the pleasure of a walk depended on meeting with humanity in its gristle, one need never fear disappointment. Children in perambulators, children in arms, children on foot, with their mammas, with their governesses, with their nursemaids, or without anybody to take care of them—sometimes in twos and threes, sometimes in troops—ragged and dirty, or trim as daisies and bright as new pins—noisy in their play, and noisy in their sorrows—they seem to abound everywhere, and leave no room

for doubt that they will "replenish the earth." This would be but a dull, prosy world without them ; a worse one, too, in all moral respects ; for, unconsciously to themselves, they exert a marvellously sweetening influence upon society.

I am not going to poach on S. G. O.'s manor. The management of the nursery is a gift to which I must resign all claim. I am afraid I should be neither very suggestive nor very trustworthy, if I were to write a practical treatise under the title of "Training Made Easy ; or, the Nursemaid's Guide." Far be it from me to disparage such works. They have their use. They, no doubt, contain hints, dropped by experience, and worth picking up. But I confess I have not much faith in them. Love and *Nous* must do the chief work, if it is to be well done—a vigilant, patient, disinterested love ; nous (excuse the word, for I cannot find its precise equivalent), which is compounded of insight, common sense, and ready resource. I am quite aware that the active exercises of both ought to be under the general dominion of a religious spirit ; but so should all other relative duties and responsibilities. Add to these qualities a merry, sunshiny, playful disposition, and I fancy you may pretty safely trust the nursery to them without worrying the authorities thereof with a multiplicity of detailed regulations. But this branch of my subject, as I said, does not fall within the limits of my present design. I meet a great many children in my "constitutional" perambulations. They always

attract my attention. They very frequently give a turn to my thoughts. I do not for a moment pretend that these latter are of the smallest practical value. They are isolated, random, inconsequential glances at interesting features and curious angles of the subject, obtained, as it were, *en passant*, not to serve a premeditated purpose. They came to me ; I did not go after them. Sometimes they beguiled a pre-occupied mind, sometimes furnished material to a vacant one. At any rate they proved their competence to enlist my feelings in their favour. Hence their place in these "wayside musings."

First of all, then, that I may make foremost mention of that which oftenest catches my notice, and which has left the deepest impression on my mind, children, up to about ten years of age, more or less, exhibit one characteristic common to them all—the life they live is exclusively and intensely *objective*. The strong currents of their being have all an outward set, all carry them towards things outside of themselves. Children are realists of the extremest class. To their apprehension everything is real, only, wholly, undeniably, unmistakably real. It is what it seems to be, has nothing illusory about it, makes no pretence to be or to do more than, in a child's belief, it is and can do. For the time present, the object which engages the interest of children is the whole world to them. They know nothing as yet of "ifs," and "buts," and promises, and limitations. Their experience has been too narrow

to become familiarized with them, and, in the rush of their little souls outwards, their memory takes no note of them. They have little or no self-consciousness. The fulness of their life is concentrated upon the single object upon which they are intent. No reminiscences mingle with and abate their sense of immediate realization. No forebodings tarnish its vividness. No reflection tones down its enthusiasm. There is no intestine strife, no coolness, no suspicion, interposing itself between what is within them, and what has a corresponding existence outside of them. The atmosphere through which they look at things is not refractive. A new doll is more to a girl, a new kite is more to a boy, than a legacy of £100,000 to a man in his maturity. It fills in for a while a larger proportionate space of thought, and affection, of trust, and the feeling of possession. It comes in sensible contact with the entire surface of the inner life, leaving no developed part of it untouched, and therefore unsatisfied—which cannot be predicated of the other. It is fulness of joy—joy without regrets, joy without apprehension—inferior, it is true, in its character, but up to the level of the capacities hitherto awakened—transient, but not known to be such. And as it is with joy, so it is with grief. A child's trouble is a trouble which fills its whole nature. Whilst it lasts, which, happily, is never long, it is like a bankruptcy of its being, in which all is lost, past, present, and future. It comes nearer to heart-breaking in its intensity than the heaviest affliction of after life. It is as if ruin had

swept over the whole soul, and the momentary sense of desolation is complete. It is this characteristic of childhood, this absorption of the whole sentient being by the objects upon which it temporarily settles, which throws around children such an atmosphere of interest. They make you feel that with them outward things are real, that they, at least, do not "walk in a vain show," that their world is not, to their apprehension "for man's illusion given," and that their little interests are commensurate with the thinking, feeling, self-acting life within them.

There is another aspect in which this characteristic presents itself. The realism of a child's impressions extends also to its beliefs. The invisible, when pictured to them by testimony, is as actual and as indubitable as the visible; the promise is as truly a possession as the performance. To children not only is sight faith, but faith is sight. Jack, the giant-killer, and Cinderella, fairies, and bogies, and any, the most improbable creations of the human fancy, are not, to their apprehension, shadowy pictures, nor fictitious beings, nor is their sphere outside of the sphere in which they themselves move. Their day-dreams are, to all the intents and purposes of their life, realities. It is said that faith is the result of unvarying experience; but the strongest, most implicit faith, is prior to experience. If faith be "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen," where will you find faith like that of children? Promise a child what you will,

and if the interval of time between the promise and the anticipated performance be such as comes fairly within its conception, the enjoyment of possession instantly begins. The future is so far drawn into the present as to become part of it. And it is beset with no difficulties, no misgivings. One of the earliest incidents of my life, of which I still retain recollection, arose out of a desire to go to France. What idea I had of France at the early age of about five years, I cannot now remember, except that it was some place across the water from which my father had shortly before brought me a toy pug-dog, which could be made to bark. I only know that I so frequently and importunately implored leave of my parents to go to France, that one afternoon, for the humour of the thing, they granted my request. My walking dress was put on, my farewell seriously taken of all the members of the family, and a small coin was put into my hand. I was told I should have to walk down to the sea-shore, on the other side of the common which our house faced, and to ask any man with a boat upon the beach to take me across, for which service I was to give him the money. I marched off without a shadow of mistrust, took my way straight across the common, and was already approaching a sailor with a view of communicating my wishes to him, when the nursemaid, who had followed at a short distance, overtook me. Of course she had some rigmarole which sufficed to overbear my purpose, and she carried me home again. But I had already as

good as realized my dream. When I left the door alone with silver in my hand, and when I toddled independently across the common towards the sea, the present enjoyment swallowed up the expectation of the future, and I realized, as far as my mind could realize it, "the substance of things hoped for."

Another idea with which most of us associate childhood is the freshness of its impressions and feelings. The other day I passed two little children, a girl and a boy, the first with her arm round the neck of the last, standing at a shop window, and looking wistfully at a trumpery lithograph print, to be sold for copying on a transparent slate. Trumpery to me, but not to them. The days have been when much poorer prints than that, given to me to copy, had excited sensations within me of admiration verging upon awe—when a clear sheet of letter-paper, received from my mother for an early trial of my taste for drawing, inspired a feeling akin to reverence, and filled me with a palpitating sense of responsibility ; and when the very smell of a newly-cut cedar pencil put into my hand diffused through my young and tender sensibilities a proud pleasure, fuller, richer, and more satisfying in its kind than any I have since experienced. Perhaps the most overpowering impression of magnificence I ever felt was made upon me by the sight of the outside of Richardson's theatre, which my nursemaid helped me to see, by raising me for a few minutes above the heads of the surrounding people at a fair. The crimson

drapery, bordered with yellow fringe, covered, to my unaccustomed eye, such a vast expanse, and the players who promenaded the stage appeared so immensely superior, in their tawdry dresses, to any conceptions of humanity which had previously entered my mind, that I was moved to tears by the sight. It haunted me for many days afterwards. It coloured my dreams. The grandeur had been too much for me. It had rolled in upon me like an inundation, and swamped my self-possession. Such reminiscences as these give children a wonderful power of attraction to my interest and sympathies. They help me to identify myself with them, and I am apt to think within myself as I pass them, "Here, at all events, there is neither scepticism nor indifference. Here life is in earnest, and all its objects, whether of faith or sight, are veritable realities."

The world, in truth, is mainly governed by influences of which children are the source. Family life is usually planned and carried on with a primary view to the little ones. With the first baby comes revolution, and, by the general consent of the household, the first and paramount consideration is held to be due to the weakest and most dependent member. New motives thereupon get into the ascendant. New wants make themselves felt. New hopes and fears come into play. New adaptations of social habits in the wider sphere outside to the obligations of the narrower one within, are desired and sought after. And where this is felt in

almost every household, the general result in the modelling of a commonwealth must be prodigious. Were some calamitous dispensation of Providence to sweep off in a night all the children under ten years of age in a nation, the moral change which would set in after the first wail of agony had subsided, would probably be disastrous beyond the power of conception. One great agency in awakening and keeping alive unselfish affection among us, and in widening the action of life beyond merely personal limits, would be gone. One grand spring of daily duty would be snapped. One main inducement of self-sacrifice would be removed. Patience, gentleness, vigilant forethought, self-constraint, condescension, kindness, would lose their most powerful and most welcome stimulant, and civilization would slide back a long way and with sad rapidity towards barbarism. To the equilibrium and orderly working of the mechanism of common life, the influence unconsciously exerted by childhood is indispensable; and deprived of it, society would soon grind itself to pieces.

It is a common saying in which there is some truth mixed with a good deal of profanity, that a special Providence watches over the lives of drunkards and little children. Let us leave the former out of our consideration, with simple disgust that they should ever have been associated with the latter in any sentence, much more in such a sentence as this. Divine Providence, undoubtedly, has so arranged His plans as

to surround children with a great number and variety of generally unnoticed provisions for their protection—provisions which, for the most part, are entirely overlooked until some hair's-breadth escape from fatal accident calls our attention to it, and leads us to regard it, not as an illustration of, but as an exception to, some general law. However, it is not my purpose to discuss the philosophy of the phenomenon. I advert to it merely as what strikes my mind as a matter of fact.

No doubt, in over-crowded cities, and among a squalid population, deaths in infancy from impure air, insufficient nourishment and clothing, parental neglect, often, I am afraid, from brutal cruelty, are perfectly appalling in number. But the circumstances in which they occur may be fairly set down as abnormal. At the same time, I am willing to admit that if a man is ever tempted to doubt whether the affairs of this world are under the control of Infinite wisdom and goodness; or, to put the case in a less exceptionable way, if ever the mysterious working of Infinite wisdom and goodness transcend a man's power of giving to himself some satisfactory account of it, it is in the case of those pallid, stunted, neglected, suffering little ones which swarm in the by-places of this metropolis, and in most of our great manufacturing towns. To borrow a phrase used by Lord John Russell to describe the condition of the British army in the Crimea, it is "horrible and heart-rending." But then one cannot but acknowledge that the fact is not in accordance with, but in

violation of, natural law—the law which represents the will of the Creator. That it is permitted to be is, when judged by our reason and not exclusively by our feelings, not more inexplicable than that evil of any kind is permitted to be—a problem of which scepticism furnishes no solution, and the clearing up of which seems to require not less, but more light, than that which in our present disciplinary state we possess.

Setting this question aside, one cannot but have noticed the protective character of the provisions made by natural law to secure the lives of little children. They are specially observable in perilous places. How many spots are there, even in this kingdom, which one would pronounce at first sight so utterly unsafe for the rearing of families as to present a hundred chances to one against its being successfully done. And yet experience shows that in such localities accident is as rare as in any others. I have watched with shivering nerves troops of young urchins making their way down the face of a cliff, or scrambling over jutting crags, where the steadiest brain, the keenest eye, and the nicest poise of the body, were indispensable to what appeared to be the dangerous feat ; but to them it hardly took the form of adventure. Wherever nature can fairly come into play, there all sorts of preservative agencies develop themselves as the need for them arises. Every faculty of the mind, every muscle of the limbs, every organ of the sense, every action of instinct, rapidly adapts itself to the situation, aided, as in all such cases it usually is,

by parental vigilance, warning, and discipline. The common result of many influences operating upon children brought up in the presence of visible dangers, clothes the young ones with a seemingly miraculous charm against accident, or as common sense would say, gives a rare power of self-preservation within the limited sphere to which they are accustomed. Besides, palpable weakness is mostly a cloak of defence where others are concerned, and childhood will generally attract to itself all the considerateness, the precaution, and the aid which may happen to be within reach of it. Notwithstanding all this, however, it is marvellous what narrow escapes children in almost every family are destined to pass through. The truth is, they are seldom out of peril of some sort; and but for the innumerable fences by which a tenderer and more watchful care than our own has surrounded them, the race would soon become extinct.

There is a disagreeable as well as an agreeable side of the subject. I am forced to see it oftener than I like. Children, as I have said before, always interest me when I meet them—not always favourably. I wish to think well of my species; children do not by any means invariably second that wish. We have seen the lights of the picture; alas, it has its shadows. The soil produces weeds as well as flowers. Sometimes untruthfulness, sometimes greed, sometimes tyranny, sometimes perversity, often impatience, almost always selfishness—nearly all the forms of moral evil which infest human

nature—how certain you may be of coming across some budding manifestations of them in one or other of the groups you casually encounter ! It is useless trying to hush up the fact—more useless still attempting to ignore it. There it is, obvious, obtrusive, undeniable, let philosophers make of it what they will. It is a sad stain upon what otherwise would be the loveliest embodiment of innocence and beauty. The capacity of wrong-doing and the will for it—it is very easy to deny that they indicate anything that is radically amiss, or to affirm that under wise culture they will disappear ; but those who have most to do with the management of children, whether in the nursery or the school, are least likely to subscribe to the flattering theory. Heart-ache, more or less frequently, alternates with pleasure in bringing up a tribe of little ones ; and in too many instances it is superinduced by the wayward dispositions, the perverse tempers, the sinful proclivities of the young ones whom parental love yearns to mould upon a pattern of true virtue.

In the characters and conduct of one's own children, moreover, the unwelcome phenomenon presents a more humiliating phase. One sees, as in a convex mirror, a miniature but somewhat distorted reflection of his own faults. A man discovers more of himself in his own offspring than ever caught his notice before, and the image of his inner self comes out in unexpected and humiliating forms. How vividly a single act of childhood flashes light into the hidden depths of their

own character, and lights up features of it which had previously been shrouded in darkness, can only be fully realized by those whose little ones are the objects of daily and watchful care. Parents get from their children unasked all the benefits, and, we may add, most of the annoyances, of severe introspection, without the concentrated effort of attention which that process demands. They have always before them, whether they like or dislike it, a gallery of illustrations in which are exhibited to them the subtlest workings of their own interior nature. If their conceit is not taken out of them by what meets their eye therein, it must be thoroughly ingrained indeed. The study of themselves in their children, not always a pleasing one, should at least be profitable. It should strip them of many a false fancy with which they have adorned themselves.

Bless the dear little creatures, nevertheless! The sweet prevails over the bitter. There are few of us, perhaps, who do not desire to comply with the apostolic injunction: "Be ye men in understanding, but in malice, little children." They are the best natural types of that spiritual character which the reign of the Anointed is designed to beget and complete. They constitute an ever fresh and attractive portion of the mystery of life. May they thrive, as there is every likelihood of their doing, in undiminished numbers! May the world into which they are introduced, become every year more and more fitted to entertain them! May love and gentleness, and intelligence and purity

smooth for them the pathway from the lower to the higher stage of being ! And may the time soon come when all the tribes of mankind shall become a united family of good and happy children consciously rejoicing in the benignant smile of the UNIVERSAL FATHER !



XIV.

BEGGARS AND THEIR CONGENERS.

THERE are a few miles of road in our neighbourhood, more used by beggars, tramps, organ-grinders, street-bands, *et id genus omne* than any other I ever knew. I have often puzzled myself to discover the reason for it, but never hit upon one which seemed to me quite satisfactory. The temptation has more than once come upon me in full force to stop one of the fraternity, bribe his confidence with a silver fee, and prevail upon him to read me the riddle ; but two considerations enabled me to master the impulse. The first was that, ten to one, the man would know very little more about the matter than I could tell him ; the second, that, by equal odds at least, he would construe the act into proof of my being a greenhorn, and would seize the occasion for trying to palm off upon me some spurious information forged with a view to his purposes rather than mine. Beggars and street-sharpers acquire by long and incessant practice a keen eye for detecting signs of weakness in those whom they meet or overtake. They often discern in a slight peculiarity of dress a key to the

character of its owner. A gentleman was one day accosted in the city by a man who had just picked up a ring, who told him that as he was present at the finding he was entitled to one half the value of the article. "But," said he, "I am poor and in immediate want; the ring will be of more use to you; give me half a crown for my share and it shall be your's." "No," replied the gentleman, "I will not do that, but I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll give you half-a-crown to tell me what you saw about me that induced you to think I could be taken in by so stale a trick as that." "Done," said the sharper, "I twigged your low shoes and white cotton stockings, and I said to myself, the chap who comes out in them this dirty weather, is game for anybody." This little incident, narrated to me by a friend many years ago, always turned up in my recollection when I thought of drawing some knowledge of beggars out of one of the tribe, and made me shy of venturing on the attempt. I feared lest my curiosity, if so exhibited, should serve as "low shoes and white cotton stockings" to suggest unflattering suspicions, and, perhaps an extempore experiment on my gullible susceptibilities.

I incline to think that the road of which I speak is the traditional outlet to the whole South-Eastern part of the kingdom for beggars who have their headquarters in the low-lying districts in the east of the metropolis. Railways have relieved it of almost all ordinary traffic; but beggars, as a rule, do not travel by

railway. Over this beat, therefore, the highway seems to be pretty much their own. They are, at a rough guess, about two to one of the wayfarers to be met with at any given hour. Not that they ply their vocation therein, except, indeed, upon the few casual passengers who offer them a chance—for the road is but dotted here and there on either side with habitations, and they appear to be tenanted by the poorest class. Here, therefore, with the exception above noted, beggars and their congeners suspend the exercise of their profession, and beguile, as they list, the tedium of their way. From all that I have been able to observe, I should conclude that their mode of picking up a living involves as much active exertion, as great an exposure to the inclemencies of the weather, and as much weariness to the flesh, as most other modes, more regular and legitimate, which are open to the labouring poor. It can hardly be selected, I should judge, with a primary view to the indulgence of indolent habits, or, if so, must very indifferently answer the end. The ranks of professional beggars, I apprehend, are not very largely swollen by such as shirk continuous and heavy toil in the more reputable walks of life. The main stream is probably composed of those who find themselves where they are in virtue of their hereditary descent, and is fed, but not abundantly, by the few whom the necessity of their circumstances, the influence of their connections, or the conscious possession of peculiar tastes and abilities, drain off from somewhat higher

ground. The profession ordinarily passes, and, in the nature of things, must pass, from generation to generation, and perhaps three out of four of those who solicit charity by the wayside have done so from earliest childhood, and could not, without a powerful wrench applied to them by other than their own will, get their subsistence in any other way. They are beggars by choice only so far as their inclination has become set in the mould into which it was first turned by their unhappy destiny. They have accommodated themselves to the lot to which they were born. For a large proportion of them no way of egress from it ever presented itself, at least when they were fairly qualified to avail themselves of it. Their antecedents have placed them in this strait, that they must either beg or starve; for hard work, the only other alternative, supposing they could get it, is as morally impossible to people brought up in their line, as to those who have been nurtured and reared in the high places of society.

The begging profession, quite apart from moral considerations, does not seem to be an enviable one. It may have its occasional *fête* days, its carousals, its intervals of coarse recreation and animal enjoyment, but its dead level has little about it calculated to tempt intruders or exploiters from other classes. No doubt, begging, regarded as a line of life, has its compensations, more showy and attractive, it may be, when seen from without, than solid and real to those who experience them. To be one's own master, independent

of immediate and urgent authority, able to consult one's own caprices—to wander at will, to rest at will, and to do what one does at the suggestion of choice rather than at the bidding of obligation, is what human nature will always prospectively prefer, and this, it may be conjectured, is a main temptation to the begging fraternity. But, in most cases, I fancy, these advantages are almost exclusively nominal, and the compulsion which determines a beggar's proceedings, and which hedges in his individual liberty, is as exacting and as little to be evaded as that which orders the course of an Irish hodman or an agricultural day-labourer. The range of his personal freedom, unbounded to outward view, is narrowed to the professional beggar by a multiplicity of restrictions; and, probably, "you must" and "you must not" prescribe his actions very nearly as often as those of any other class. Quite irrespectively of any knowledge of the matter I have gathered from reading, such has been the impression left upon my mind by all that has fallen under my own observation. Of the scores upon scores of the tribe I usually encounter every week, I have very rarely met with one that did not exhibit a more or less worn and haggard expression of countenance. Except in boys and girls under fourteen years of age, as I should judge, I never even accidentally witnessed any display by them of animal elasticity. In the fields they are not gamesome. Along the roadside they appear to carry with them a burden of care. This may be due, in

part, to the habits enforced upon them by their calling, but frequently as I have come upon a family of them at unawares, I have no recollection of having ever surprised them in a fit of merriment. Their life appears to be one of wearisome drudgery, and such relaxation as their pursuits will admit of seems to be reserved till after business hours, whatever they may be.

No one who has ever given the least thought to the question can harbour a doubt of the serious loss, commercial and moral, inflicted on communities by a mendicant class. Pathetically as the feelings will sometimes plead in support of the beggar's petition, that must be either a very ill-informed or ill-regulated judgment which will sanction, under whatsoever benevolent pretext, such treatment of the evil as manifestly tends to confirm and increase it. And yet it is difficult to turn a deaf ear to the entreaties, however preferred, of real poverty, without hardening the heart. Not every one who can boast, as Archbishop Whately did, that he had never given a penny to a beggar in his life, can be equally successful in preserving uninjured the delicacy of his sympathies for other forms of human suffering, and the readiness of his hand to minister relief to them — so much rarer is a painstaking and judicious, than an uninquiring and indiscriminate, liberality.

On a superficial view of the matter, it cannot but strike one as a harsh thing to visit on the heads of mendicants themselves all the severity due to mendicity, especially when, as is mostly the case, they were born

into it, have been shapen by it, cannot break the bands which bind them to it, and are dependent upon it for daily subsistence. So, undoubtedly, it would be, if society, which alone could convert the theory into a fact, were to carry out the measure. If it were feasible, by means of any conceivable social resolution, to extirpate the begging system to-morrow, it would not be just, certainly it would not be humane, to do it without devising some plan by which the present generation of beggars might be helped to escape the personal consequences of the act. But, in truth, the supposition is a purely imaginary one. The system is never likely to be put an end to in this way. There will always be, until the advent of a much brighter day than can be expected by this or by the next generation, more than a sufficiency of that careless and impulsive liberality which constitutes the soil upon which beggary finds its sustenance. The practical danger is not that of diminishing but of extending its area ; not of starving out the tribe, but of increasing their numbers. Such being the case, the question which comes before the individual conscience for decision, assumes a shape which leaves no room for hesitation. By withholding assistance from vagrant mendicancy, the utmost you can do is to prevent the foul stream from widening or overflowing its existing channel. Ought not this to be done ? Have we any right to indulge our sensibilities at the certain cost to society of increasing *pro tanto* one of its most inveterate and pernicious maladies ? This

is the view of the subject which determines my own rule of proceeding—a rule which I feel bound in conscience, save under very exceptional circumstances, to carry out in spite of my feelings.

Professional begging has become a chronic symptom of the unhealthy condition of modern society ; but it should be carefully borne in mind that it is a *symptom* only, and that it points to something more seriously amiss than itself. Like the grog-blossoms of the habitual tippler, it tells a humiliating tale of the kind of life by which it is produced. It is the authorized protest, which cannot be suppressed, against a systematic neglect of social responsibilities. It has its commission from the Supreme Ruler, even though it executes it as unconsciously as the loathsome parasites that at once proclaim and avenge neglect of the body. It is not to be got rid of by mere external treatment, nor by aiming at its suppression as if it were itself the disease. The life-blood of the community must be morally enriched and sweetened before it will die away. When that which is now the exception shall become the rule—when those who have shall recognise their responsibility for the misery of those who have not—when everywhere it will be felt as a disgrace to ask, “Am I my brother’s keeper?”—when the most sagacious and constructive intellect of society shall unite with its tenderest philanthropy in devising means for the more equable circulation to the very extremities of the body social of all the elements whereby its health is main-

tained, and the best part of head and heart shall be consecrated, as to the noblest work which can employ them on earth, to the help of the falling, and the rescue of the fallen—when, in fine, society shall exhibit not merely a unity of organization, but a living unity of feeling, and every disturbance of its lower functions and every lesion of its humbler members shall transmit a thrill of pain to the highest;—then the beggar's vocation will cease to be; for then the apostolic injunction will recover its pristine authority: "If any man among you will not work, neither let him eat." This happy condition of things, however, is not likely to be brought about by any agency which is incapable of touching the selfishness of human motives; and, unless there be any other influence in the world equally searching, equally energetic, equally vivifying as the love of God revealed in Gospel history, this is a consummation which is specially reserved for Christianity to achieve.

Meanwhile, it is for those who clearly perceive the mischief of fostering professional mendicancy by feeding it with alms and doles, to give more fitting exercise and wiser expression to their sympathies and liberality by a hearty encouragement of such organized efforts as fairly "help the poor to help themselves;" always bearing in mind, however, that the principal social evils and nuisances of the present day demand not only, not even mainly, the generous distribution of wealth to flood them from their haunts, as their being put in daily contact with nobler types of humanity than those with

which they are necessarily, and too exclusively, familiar. That which has originated in a moral poverty of the blood must be cured, if at all, by something that will restore to the vital fluid the constituent elements which it most lacks. If there be one thing more than another from which the general tone of society suffers, it is the segregation of classes, the entire absence of all community of life between them, the destruction of not only the mechanical, but, as I may say, the chemical affinities which give homogeneity to the whole frame. Towards remedying this defect our most thoughtful, self-denying, and persistent endeavours should be directed. In fact, our refusing to tamper with the external symptoms is of little use, unless accompanied by active measures for grappling with the internal disease.

Passing now from beggars to their congeners, tramps claim a priority of notice ; to wit, men, and, occasionally, women, traversing the country on the look-out for work, and, with more or less reluctance, asking casual alms for their maintenance meanwhile. It is in favour of these people, wherever I think I can distinguish them from professional mendicants, that I justify myself in deviating from the rule I have already mentioned. That there is a considerable class of men who will work when they can get employment, but whom want of employment drives at intervals on to the roads in search of it wherever it is most likely to be found, and to whom begging by the wayside is a *pis aller*, cannot be questioned. If one

could but be sure of his men, these are they whom it would be pleasant to assist. I wonder it has never occurred to some constructive genius to organize a system by means of which real workmen while in quest of labour might receive sufficient support without being obliged to solicit alms. Surely, the thing might be done, and, like sick clubs, might be made self-supporting. Doubtless, the machinery would require to be put together with the nicest skill, in order to work freely for its purpose, and at the same time correct all tendencies to abuse; but that such machinery might be devised, I do not question. With the example of Post Office Savings' Banks before us, I cannot think the idea need be a visionary or hopeless one. But, in truth, it is conceivable that the entire relationship of employers to employed in every branch of trade and manufacture, is capable of a much higher organization than it has yet received, and that due attention to the matter might succeed in the establishment of a system by which lack of hands, at any given time, in any given locality, in regard to any given work, might instantly be made known to hands lacking employment, and the adjustment of the one to the other effected as regularly as by clock-work. In addition to the moral advantages which would accrue from such a system, immense waste would be thereby saved. When the same ingenuity which is now devoted to the solution of problems connected with gunnery and fortifications, floating or fixed, shall come to be applied to the solution

of social problems, many of the evils which we now bemoan as if they were inevitable, will speedily and for ever disappear.

I am almost afraid to trust my pen on the subject of organ-grinders, inasmuch as my feelings as well as my judgment are enlisted against them. The nuisance is not an indigenous one. It has not sprung up spontaneously, at least on British soil. It is entirely factitious. It results from importation, and is commonly made use of by heartless and greedy scoundrels to levy a kind of black-mail upon quiet-loving people. One has not even the consolation of being able to think that the wretched men and boys who drive him mad with their music, pocket for their own advantage the hush-money which they extort. They are little better than the slaves of those who bring them over, supply them with tools, and mulct them of a large percentage of their gains. I met the other day with a newspaper paragraph which, as it throws some light upon the subject, I transcribe for the benefit of my readers. It runs thus: "The Italian Consul-General at Brussels, Signor Jacomo Errara, has, in pursuance of his instructions, sent circulars to all lodging-house keepers, urging them to notify the number of organ-grinders and boys in their employment who lurk in that capital, that steps may be taken, in conjunction with the Belgian authorities, for securing such of these practitioners as seek to evade the conscription by organized mendicancy far from home. These stalwart vagabonds carry

on a sort of slave-trade that has long been found a nuisance of a most demoralizing character, and without some common agreement between France, England, and Belgium, there is small prospect of checking its continuance. *L'Independence Belge* asserts that thousands of these vagrants are annually cleared out of that kingdom by sending them across the French frontier; but the French police, instead of forwarding them southwards, invariably shift the burden on England, from which the sturdy wanderers find their way back to Belgium; and this vicious circle is the established curriculum of their predatory operations. The lazy dogs eschew a spade or a firelock in Italy, for a hurdy-gurdy abroad, and find encouragement rather than apprehension on this side the Alps." We hear, both in Parliament and out of it, a good deal of high-flown sentiment in favour of giving these people full liberty to din her Majesty's subjects out of their peace or their coppers. It were much to be wished that folks who indulge this little bit of luxurious feeling at so cheap a rate, would reflect on the vast expense, not so much in an economical as in a social and moral sense, their support of the system inflicts on the community.

The topic of these reflections is not an inviting one, confessedly. I should be thankful if it were much seldomer thrust upon my thoughts. For my own part, however, I find it impossible to get out of the beat of those whose manner of life suggests it, and since it so

frequently colours my "wayside musings," I could hardly avoid recurring to it in these pages. If any apology is due to my reader on that account, I tender it without hesitation.



XV.

SPRINGTIME.

O FOR some word of exclamation capable of satisfying the irrepressible desire one feels to give adequate utterance to that freshness and fulness of inward life evoked by the smiles which, in springtime, brighten the face of Nature! O for some articulate sound into which it were possible to cram at once volumes of meaning and countless changes of emotion! Language is but an indifferent and stammering representative of deep feeling; all the more so when that feeling is glad-some and jubilant. Where can one find terms in which to express the delicious sense which springtime brings to him of sunshine, and balmy airs, and blooming flowers, and opening but modest presages of coming good, not only in the world outside of him, but in his inner self? We cannot find them in any tongue, although, doubtless, some are better fitted than our own to interpret the tender joyousness of the soul which the material regeneration is so apt to inspire. I, for my part, yearn to do as the birds do—warble and trill and carol forth my heart in incessant strains of melodious hilarity. Morning after morning, I feel as

if I should like to take wing as the lark, and, fluttering upwards and still upwards, to pour out my pent-up gladness in gurgling streams of song. Evening after evening I envy the thrush as he sits upon some tall tree, and utters his sonorous but liquid notes of thanksgiving to the retiring day. True, man has his object, his motives, and his mode of praise; but, alas! there is more or less of effort in it. It comes not forth from him spontaneously and naturally; and, to himself at least, it is very inharmonious and inadequate at best.

What a glorious world this is, as God makes it! and when springtime "renews the face of the earth," what a manifold loveliness pervades it! Who can look up into the blue sky, or watch the slowly-sailing masses of bright white clouds, or feel the vernal breezes on his cheek, or gaze upon the velvety meadows, and budding copses, and newly-clad hedge-rows, whether lapped in sunlight or bathed with dew, or sobered by the overcast heavens, without feeling borne in upon his soul an unutterable sense of the purity which they exhale—purity and bliss? Who can see the bursting forth of insect life, or listen to the choral festivals of the feathered race, or watch the gambols of the younglings of flocks and herds, or be attracted by the visible rejoicing of trees in their bloom, without catching somewhat of their playful, laughing mood, and being impressed with the thought that cheerfulness, ripening into happiness, is the normal condition of the lower grades of creation? And that all-pervading purity and

bliss—how it freshens us, like a draught from the running brook after a wearisome and dusty day's march! These are, if I may venture to say so, the sparkling and pellucid element in which to lave the soul, to cool down its fever of passion, and to invigorate its consciousness of obligation and duty. These are pleasures to which, for the time being, it is not only allowable but beseeeming to yield ourselves, with all the *abandon* of which our natures are capable, in the full conviction that, instead of enervating, they will brace our moral system, and so far from contaminating and corrupting, will rather cleanse it. Joy, be it remembered, is a duty, and a gleesome mood is sometimes the holiest, because the most appropriate, we can cherish and exhibit.

It is a matter of legitimate and interesting, even if it be fruitless, speculation, whether and to what extent, great cities will constitute a feature of that better age to which the inherent tendencies, no less than the direct prophecy, of Christianity bid us look forward—whether the inexorable demands of commerce and the wants of society will impose upon a portion, and that, too, a very large portion of our race, the necessity of spending the greater part of their lives within sight of nothing but brick walls and stone pavements and a smoke-and-dust laden atmosphere—whether, as men become more and more susceptible to the charms of Nature, the arrangements of Divine Providence will shut them out more hopelessly from the leisurely

enjoyment of them. I hope not. I hold that even now they are deeply to be pitied whose lot in life precludes them from any but the merest snatch of pleasure to be derived from communion with the Creator in His works, and to whom no change of season, not even the transition from winter to spring—from death to life—brings any novelty, to say nothing of gratification. No doubt, we adapt ourselves to our position with admirable certainty, and find some kind of compensation for what we lose wherever duty places us. But it is pleasant to think that the time may come when, owing to the progress of the applied sciences, and to alterations in our modes and habits of conducting business, nobody will be condemned to the monotony of a city life, or, at any rate, to exclusion from free and frequent converse with the purer, serener, and more refining enjoyments which our mother earth offers in such rich profusion to her children. I fancy that society has not yet got above the clumsiest and most disagreeable expedients for supplying its own wants, and that a deeper insight into the forces and mechanism of nature may, at some distant day, enable man to do all that he is capable of doing without being necessarily subjected to daily humiliations, privations, and dangers. Surely so much and such variety of beauty as God has given to His own handiwork will not be always wasted, so far as the greater proportion of our race is concerned. The time, I hope, will come at last when spring and summer,

autumn and winter, will bring their appropriate and characteristic blessings to every member of Adam's posterity.

Sometimes I incline to indulge the idea, albeit the truth of it is not invariably ratified by experience, that the annual renovation of the outer world tends to produce a corresponding renewal in the inner one. Springtime is certainly calculated to suggest to the mind purer and more uprising thoughts than it ordinarily entertains, and to impart to whatever seeds of good there may be in us a germinating force. If ever our impulses prompt us to do noble things, they should do so at this beneficent season. The influence which floats everywhere around us seems to penetrate, and to some extent soften, the hard incrustation of selfishness which has grown over our souls. The chilled affections regain some warmth. The more delicate sensibilities open, like early flowers, to the genial action of increased light and a higher temperature. Gloomy and dispiriting views of life, so apt to wither away the best motives, disappear for a while, and man comes out of himself to greet and care for something besides his own interests and passions. You may see in him, if you observe closely, all the primary elements of a better nature at hand, and in preparation for employment. The soil crumbles and opens, as if waiting for some vital truth. Now is the time to present it with hope of its springing up after many days ; and, let me add, now, while the susceptibility lasts, is the time for men

to cultivate to the utmost those higher aspirations and capabilities which they are so prone to neglect. I am fully sensible of the truth that mere evolutions of matter cannot radically and essentially change the dispositions of the heart—that spirit, in its higher sense, can only be born of spirit—but I know also that the best of seed will be all the likelier to quicken when favoured by surrounding incidents, and that, morally, one can labour with brighter hopes of success when there is pleasant sunshine in the soul.

Nevertheless, springtime, at least in this country, is not all geniality. It has its bitter alternations. It tries a man's patience, as well as thaws his sensibilities. When the east wind refuses for weeks and weeks to give us that "room" which is better than its "company," we all know what happens. Let no man ask a favour of his friend at such a time! Let no one expect too much civility! O, commend me to an obstinate east wind for drying up the sources of charity, and driving back the streams of kindness! No doubt, we are bound to be cheerful, as Mark Tapley puts it, "under creditable circumstances;" but it is a hard matter, it must be owned. Even here, however, we may gather some strength from reflection. The wind which searches us in the inmost nooks and corners of our bodily frame, which abstracts from it so large a proportion of what nature has provided for lubrication, which turns us into mere bundles of whip-cord, and which makes us sapless, sugarless, and snappy, has its

own work to do, and does it for our benefit. It sucks up swamps. It clears away the messes which winter has left behind it. It has so much heavy business to get through on our account, that we may well forgive it for being unmannerly and rude. We must bear with it as we do with an honest, hard-working, but uncouth and crusty servant. And then, at last, when it has done what it came for, and has gone, and the dust which it raised has settled down again, how rollicking our spirits grow, and with what a keen zest do we enjoy the "cleaned up" habitation !

Most people, in the course of their lives, pass through an experience analogous to springtime. I do not allude to their youth, though in respect of that, unquestionably, the analogy is obvious at a glance. My reference is rather to that season in a man's affairs when, whatever be his main purpose, all the external conditions indispensable to its being achieved present themselves. Shakespeare has described it in his well-known lines :—

"There is a tide in the affairs of men,
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;
Neglected, all the voyage of their lives
Is bound in shallows and in miseries."

After a more or less protracted period of merely preparatory work, and more or less hope in the performance of it, there seems to be a relaxation of the severities which forbid both the appearance and the

expectation of immediate promise. One by one the signs of life show themselves above the surface. The sap rises. There is actual growth, almost imperceptible at first, but distinct enough to leave no room for mistake. The atmosphere becomes clearer and brighter, and generally more genial. Then, at length, comes the strong sunshine of conviction that the pursuit, or business, or enterprise upon which the man has embarked his chief interest and hopes, is not an illusion, but may be dealt with thenceforth as, at least, a potential reality. Of course, there will be, under such circumstances, a sudden and immense expansion of hope; and this constitutes the great danger of the season. For hope may either spur to increased effort, or intoxicate the mind with a fallacious prevision of success. No one can expect fruit where there is no blossom; but it is too often taken for granted that where there is blossom there will certainly be fruit. He who in his springtime discounts his autumn, takes the surest way to bring himself to grief. But this is what many do, and then blame the fickleness of fortune. How many an undertaking which might have succeeded, fails utterly because its earlier promises, instead of stimulating its promoters to more watchful care, to greater patience, and to more energetic exertion, tempt them to make use of the beginning as if it were the end, and to glorify themselves in putting on their armour as if they were putting it off? In all departments of life and activity one sees too much of this—too much of it,

very likely, in himself. Nevertheless it is very pleasant, as it may be useful, if wisely turned to account, to welcome a springtime in our graver affairs. The more serious the enterprise upon which we are engaged, the more delicious are the indications that it is destined to live, to grow, to bear fruit, unless prematurely cut off by our own folly. True, he who works with no higher motive than success, works to comparatively little purpose. He may "have his reward," such as it is—a reward in strict proportion to his end. But prospect of success, even where a man's aspirations and objects are most unselfish, is a stimulant which, when offered, never need be thrown aside, and, as human nature is constituted, may and will always be thankfully accepted. Happy he who can plod on with his chosen task when all the appearances around him are bleak and wintry, and apparently immoveable! Happier still, if before he is called to his rest, he is permitted to *see*, as well as believe, that he is not "labouring in vain, nor spending his strength for nought"!

There is still a higher analogy which this season of the year suggests. Our present lifetime is but the spring of our existence. Grateful, for the most part, in itself, it has a prospective reference which, to those who will so regard and use it, is unspeakably more so. We have but, as it were, the germs of good and evil character in us, which may the one, under careful culture, spring up and even blossom here, and the

other, owing to neglect, overspread, like weeds, the entire surface of our souls, but which, whether of the one sort or the other, are chiefly important as they unfold the possibilities of our future destiny. This springtime of ours will pass into summer, when everything which has become part of our indestructible selves—part of our character—will come under more potent influences, and be developed in much greater fullness. The laws of nature foreshadow the laws of mind. Nothing in itself perishable can abide the test of immortality. The harvest will, in some adequate sense, correspond with the seedtime. This lesson all the works of God agree in teaching. The principle is clear; the precise manner in which it will assert itself may well, regard being had to the limitations of our powers, be shrouded in mystery. It suffices to know that “whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap,” and that that which is in its own nature Godlike, Divine, can never die. If our spring, therefore, be not a joyful augury of a coming summer and autumn, it is because we are neglecting its proper work. Its laws, when conformed to, all tend to perfection. Its promises, when rightly understood, invite hearty and glad reliance.

Whether for what it is, or for what it typifies, let us greet returning springtime with hilarious acclamations, and accept with thankfulness its compound of bitters and sweets. The man who does not love it, spite of its vicissitudes, is to be pitied. As we cast

aside the last relic of winter attire, and go forth with merry heart to welcome the visitor, "come at last," "come for good," "come to stay with us," we ought to feel, and we hope most of us do feel, that we are treated infinitely better than we deserve. There is round about us plenty of stimulus to faith, hope, and charity—faith in the unfailing goodness of Him whom the seasons obey—hope that the Spring of the soul will be succeeded by the fuller enjoyment of its more advanced seasons—charity that, remembering what multitudes of sins have been covered in our own case, readily throws a veil over those of others. Ay, 'tis a beautiful world after all, and each of us, if he would, might make it still more lovely, both for himself and his fellows. Well, we must labour on as people may and should who believe in the "good time coming." Their expectations are not set upon a myth, neither, we trust, are ours. The law of God's moral government will be certain, sooner or later, to take effect. "Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart."



XVI.

FOLKS' FACES.

AN odd topic, some of my readers will think. Just so; nevertheless, it is one to which the attention of most people who walk an hour or two every day is sure to be more or less frequently called. The wayside without its passengers would be as incomplete as the landscape without its figures. Occasionally, indeed, a ramble becomes additionally attractive, when the district in which it is taken holds out a chance of unbroken solitude. But as I can be alone in my study as long as I choose, I prefer, when out of doors, a glimpse of others; and our neighbourhood, although not inconveniently crowded, is not lacking in respect of company.

Perhaps, before going further, I ought to explain that, under the heading of this paper, I feel free to speak of whatever in the people I meet with on the wayside contributes to visible expression. I shall not restrict my remarks to the face proper, but because the face is emphatically the medium by which the soul discloses its moods and movements to the eyes of others, I find it convenient to make the word do duty for much else

that is akin to it. Of most folk it is observable that there is not a little belonging to their personal appearance which, besides what may be gathered from their faces, reveals more or less distinctly their inner selves. Their walk, their gesture, their very attire, oftentimes eke out the expression of which their faces are the principal organ. Accordingly, as accessories, they are all included in the term.

Of course, a large majority of the faces we catch sight of in any district from day to day are of a character which does not incite to speculation. They differ from each other in every respect but one—that of expression. In this they are all alike—they express nothing particular. Every one of them is capable of vividly representing the mind whenever it may chance to be in intense action; when it is in an ordinary state of rest, as, for the most part, it is on the occasions which bring it under notice, the face tells of little beyond the presence of mere animal life. The commonness of what you see does not consist in the features, which may be beautiful or the reverse of beautiful, but in their entire non-suggestiveness. They do not *speak*, or, at any rate, they speak of nothing which you are interested in knowing. They tell you approximately something of the age of those to whom they belong; but they tell you little more. Of what lies behind them, relating to personal history, to culture, to past efforts, struggles, aspirations, disappointments, joys, and woes, they bear not a trace. The tale they tell is simply one of dull

routine—of eating and drinking, and discharging daily duties, and sleeping, and of a certain progress through life without much having been done towards unfolding its more distinctive capabilities. For it is not until *character* has become fixed, or, perhaps I may say more correctly, it is only where there is sufficient force of character to keep the current of a man's thoughts and affections mainly in one direction, that it can make itself perceptible through the countenance when in a state of repose.

The foregoing observations, however, are meant to apply chiefly to the unconscious expression of individual character by means of the face. But to an observant and well-trained eye, national and even provincial origin reveals itself through the same medium with wonderful distinctness. There are few, for example, to whom a descendant of Abraham, male or female, however clad or in whatsoever country born, is not at once and unmistakeably self-pronounced. Scarcely less distinct is the Milesian type of face; for you rarely need wait to hear an Irishman's brogue before deciding that he comes from the Emerald Isle. Of Scotchmen one is not always so sure, nor of Welshmen, yet, in both the national cast of countenance is perceptible in the great majority of instances. Passing by the Frenchman, the German, the Spaniard, and other national varieties, all more or less plainly imprinted on the face, I may go on to remark that provincials are capable of classification in this matter. Lancashire has its common mould,

so has Yorkshire. A genuine specimen of the eastern counties would never be mistaken for one of the west, by any one familiar with the inhabitants of both districts. No doubt, the habits of modern society, easy connection between all parts of England and the metropolis by railways, and a constantly increasing number of intermarriages, tend to efface local peculiarities of persons ; but they are still discernible in many that one meets with. And the fact, like that of family likenesses, of which, indeed, it is only a repetition on a larger scale, is full of material for thought.

Perhaps, nothing but actual observation could have convinced us that out of so few elements as are furnished by the facial features could such illimitable combinations differing from each other proceed as that there should be sufficient sameness, not only for family, but for provincial and national classification, coexistent with sufficient difference to distinguish every individual from every other. Looked at in the light of this fact, so full of mystery, yet so common, is it possible to conceive of an organ of expression more wonderfully flexible than the human face ? But this fact, after all, is but half the marvel. Each face which in structural formation links together the individual, the multitudinous, and we may even say, the universal, without parting with anything essentially characteristic of either, is capable also of giving silent utterance to every kind and degree of emotion as it momentarily agitates the mind—nay, more, of indicating where the mind has

been under high intellectual culture, and where it has been usually suffered to run to waste. But I am insensibly getting a little ahead of my present topic, at least of that aspect of it now under notice—namely, national and provincial types of physiognomical expression. They who are interested in making observations in this field of study, may do so almost any day in the Crystal Palace or its grounds. Nowhere, in England, I imagine, within so small a compass, will so many varieties of illustration be found as there. To a limited extent, the waysides of the surrounding neighbourhood are indebted to that circumstance for a rather unusual sprinkling among the denizens of the locality of persons whose faces bear the impress of far-off birthplaces, and suggest to any one who, perchance, has nothing better to think of, matter for speculation. We may leave the accident of the moment to determine whether that speculation shall be physiological, æsthetical, political, ethical, or religious.

I come now to faces which interest you by the glimpse they give you of what is, for the time being, uppermost in the minds of their owners. Sometimes—not very often—you come across men so intent upon their own thoughts that they appear to have lost all consciousness of the outer world. I don't know why it should be so, but so it is, that very few sights are more diverting than that of a man bearing himself in public as if there were no public within sight. Here comes one, for example, who is evidently practising a

bit of oratory which, no doubt, a few evenings hence, he will exhibit to a bored or a delighted audience, either as chairman or as mover of a resolution. He is so wrapped up in his theme as not to have noticed, perhaps not to have been capable of noticing, that he is within view of a fellow-creature. There is a solemn earnestness in his countenance which tells you that he has before him, in imagination, a deeply interested and sympathizing assembly. The muscles of his face are in full play. The movement of his lips show that he is speaking continuously, albeit in such an undertone that you cannot hear a syllable. His somewhat vehement gesticulation leads you to infer that he is passionately pleading. I respect the man for the pains he is taking to prepare for what he most likely holds to be, and maybe is, an important duty, yet I cannot help smiling at the unconscious exhibition he is making of himself. Even his case, however, does not present such a provocation to laughter as that of the man who is silently mastering, as he walks, some abstruse idea—striving to solve a problem which, for the present, is plainly beyond his reach. The traces of intellectual effort are distinctly visible on his countenance. His screwed-up eyes which seem to see nothing, his puckered face, his half-open mouth, his protruded chin, his clenched fists, and his irregular gait, make up as ludicrous a picture as can well be imagined, and yet, in all probability, there is nothing ludicrous in the action of the mind thus oddly indicated. The amusement of a chance spec-

tator, I fancy, arises mainly out of the surprise suddenly excited in his mind at the contrast displayed by what he sees and what he expected to see. Anything in the shape of involuntary grimace tickles one amazingly. I have sometimes found myself on the verge of perpetrating a decided breach of manners on witnessing the startling contortion of countenance exhibited by a friend in attempting to pull out a cork from a bottle of wine ; or on observing a certain tortuous shake of his leg in flinging a bowl towards the jack ; and, I confess, I am very similarly affected by odd external traits of abstraction which catch my observation unexpectedly by the roadside. I am inclined to think that many of us, without having the remotest suspicion of the fact, put on at times an aspect irresistibly comical in the eyes of others, and that if we could suddenly see ourselves in a mirror, we should be utterly unable to repress our laughter.

A much more numerous and entirely opposite class of casual wayfarers are almost as amusing. They court observation. They evidently go in search of food for their vanity. Their every movement indicates a predominant desire that they should be taken notice of. The self-satisfied smirk on the countenance, the swift, sidelong glance of the eye, the artificial, almost technical, pose of the body, the mincing gait, the wonderfully natty adjustment of the dress, combine to betray the purpose of the mind. "Look and admire" is the injunction which everything about them

seems intended to enforce upon every passer-by. Such people, but for the physical inconvenience and impossibility of the thing, would enjoy being hung up in the portrait-gallery of a well-thronged exhibition, and overhearing the criticisms of spectators. I am bound to say that of the many specimens of this class which, in the course of a month, I encounter in my walks, the masculine so nearly equal the feminine in average number, that I should hesitate to decide which sex predominates. Has it been always thus? or does the luxury of our times bring out into greater prominence than heretofore the personal vanity of men? Of *youth*, I was going to say—but, really, I encounter so comparatively large a number of grey-headed coxcombs, that I should be doing an injustice to the young by imputing this foible exclusively to them, and in the majority of instances, among the males at any rate, it is rather the “get up” of the person, than the person itself, that is expected to attract attention. It cannot be denied that this kind of demonstration has its serious and saddening side; but one does not always feel, nor wish to feel, in the Heraclitus’ vein, especially when recreation is the object; and, perhaps, this is one of the cases in which it is preferable, both for one’s own sake and for that of others, to notice the ridiculous rather than the lamentable phase of the spectacle presented.

There are some faces which, at first glance, touch and stir your heart. Now and then your eyes light

upon one upon which the ravages of care have left deep furrows, or upon which recent grief has visibly encamped. Your gaiety of spirits is instantly reined up, and conjecture busies itself with the possible causes of what you feel yourself almost guilty of intrusion at having observed. For affliction is sacred, and no man likes to suspect that he may have thoughtlessly thrust himself into its presence. What a personal history may be involuntarily hinted at by that haggard expression! You see only the title of the chapter—what if you could read its whole contents? Perhaps they would disclose to you a terrible “skeleton in the house,” and make you sharer in the secret of an unhappy home. Perhaps those few pathetic lines on the countenance are scars referable to many a battle with invading want, when all that is dearest to human nature seemed exposed to imminent peril. Perhaps—worst of all—“filial ingratitude” has been gnawing at that heart for years past, and keeping the soul upon a rack of humiliation, agony, and fear. Might it not have been thus with yourself, but that the discipline appointed you by an overruling wisdom has made your lot more endurable? Or, where the traces of suffering are fresher, and indicate only an immediate trouble—a sort of sudden thunder-storm which has already spent its force and is passing away—who can tell the irreparable mischief it may have done, or how long it may take to remove the vestiges of its fury? One can only, in spirit, bow reverentially in sight of misfortune, and

give thanks that he was not the selected victim. If the sight sober him, let him not be impatient, nor turn away from it as out of harmony with his own state of feeling! He may have need, just then, of such a memento. It may yet, in some way, help him in his own course. No exercise of the sympathies is finally thrown away. What we see in others, as well as what takes place in our own experience, contributes to the formation of character—the end for which we live.

But there are radiant faces, thank God! among those which fall under my casual notice—faces beaming with kindness—faces introducing brother and sister Cheerables, brimming over with benevolence. They are rare, it is true, but they enter an appearance sometimes, and it is worth walking a long distance to look upon one of them, even but for an instant. It is like a gleam of sunshine suddenly thrown into a dreary chamber—it lights up everything within reach of it, and tips it with a golden hue. Such faces I hold to be among the most effective sermons that can be addressed to you. What a sweet, penetrative, purifying efficacy they have! How instantaneously, yet how softly, they radiate warmth into the heart, teaching that highest of all lessons, that to give love is to kindle love! In this case, too, as in the former, one is curious to know the personal history which briefly indicates itself by such expressions. For, although it is reasonable to conclude that there must be a happy balance of natural

qualities, it is also tolerably certain that the light which permeates and bursts through every feature of the countenance comes from a source which has been habitually and constantly fed. There has probably been, at some earlier stage, a gallant and successful struggle with the selfishness of human nature to unseal that deep spring of kindly feeling, and a watchful effort day by day, perhaps, to keep it ever open and prevent its being crusted over with what would obstruct its flow. The peaceful gladness which is so contagious, and which evidently yearns to communicate itself as widely as possible, can only be the echo of some outer gladness to which the soul has been wont to listen. The sunshine is but reflected sunshine, and would surely intermit its rays but for the gloriously unclouded orb from which they are borrowed. I feel a strong desire sometimes to get nearer to the inner life of such individuals, and ascertain more accurately its entire process—what was its origin, how it was nurtured, how sustained, how disciplined, how brought to such an enviable state of development. I cannot believe it to be a happy accident. I am convinced it is, in every instance in which it shows itself, the result of law—of law which might produce the effect in others not less favourably circumstanced, but yet displaying no such results—of law which will yet gradually elevate the race in general to this exalted pitch of feeling and character. Love begets love, and, in the end, will overcome whatever opposes it. The little leaven

hidden in the meal is destined in due time to leaven the whole lump.

This faith is as needed as it is consolatory. I like to fall back upon it whenever, as will sometimes happen, I catch a glimpse of faces upon which depravity has cut its broad arrow in proof of its sovereignty—lust-worn faces, indicative of that internal anarchy which has succeeded in casting down the image of God in the soul, and left it to be overgrown by the rankest weeds of vice. It is a fearful sight in man or woman, more revolting and terrible in the latter than in the former. One is tempted occasionally to imagine, or, at any rate, try to imagine, in regard to any specimen of the type from which sin looks out unabashed as from an impregnable fortress, the contrast between what it is, and what it probably was in early childhood. What a long undisputed reign of self-will there must have been to make the chasm between the one and the other so broad and so deep! Is it possible for it, under any conceivable circumstances, to recover the power of expressing, not innocence, but submission, rest, trust, love, purity, bliss? Very imperfectly, I suspect. The edifice has become dilapidated beyond all possibility of effectual repair, and its tenant, however changed in nature, habits, and prospects, must endure both its unsightliness and its inconvenience till death pulls it down. We cannot reasonably affect to doubt the disapprobation with which our Father in heaven views and treats a persistent course of antagonism to His laws, if

we will but read it in the havoc it makes of the face wherever lawlessness has become abandoned.

Sighs and laughter come from the same neighbourhood—the diaphragm. It is not only not contrary to, but in strict conformity with, the natural order of things, that we pass abruptly from grave to gay. I have a word or two to say on humorous faces, and this strikes me as the most fitting place for it. The reader, no doubt, knows what it is to leave a hot bath in which for twenty minutes or half an hour he has been giving every possible facility for escape by innumerable open pores to the grosser humours of the body, for a plunge, heels-over-head, into a cold one. The sudden transition is the best means of preventing lassitude and the chills to which it renders one an easy prey. It has the same effect in the higher departments of our nature. After a period of intensest solemnity the overstrained powers delight to take a header into a sea of fun. It is quite a mistake to resist the impulse. It soon spends itself if indulged, without impairing in the end the impression previously made by more sacred things; nay, it tends rather to fix than to dissipate that impression. And so I conclude these observations on “folks’ faces” with a brief reference to those of them which appear to have been fashioned with a view to express oddity, whimsicality, or overflowing merriment. Illustrations will occur to every one—faces which are a joke in themselves, and upon which, whenever your eye alights, you feel all your risible susceptibilities stirred



into un wonted sensitivity. The persons to whom they belong ought to be paid for going about in public ; for the unexpected laughter which they provoke relieves people and wakens them up as thoroughly as a good sneeze. Indeed, they may be said to do a similar good turn for the mind which a very occasional pinch of snuff does for the body. They are benefactors, often quite unconscious ones, to their species. I always hope that the exercise of their powers gives as much enjoyment to themselves as to others.

Here, then, according to promise, I close my list. It might, as the reader is well aware, be indefinitely extended. I have only ventured to offer a few strangely characteristic samples, by way of showing what abundant material for entertaining speculation commonly presents itself in the course of an ordinary daily walk. Rudeness is quite unnecessary—to glance into the faces of those you meet in a public place is neither impertinent nor unnatural. More than a passing glance is not requisite. The tale told by the face, if tale there is to tell, is told in an instant ; and whether it be fictitious or founded in fact, whether wholly imaginary or in outline true, it ministers to a pleasant and not unwholsome diversion of the thinking powers. So, at least, I have found it.



XVII.

DUSTY ROADS.

To the pedestrian every season of the year has its drawbacks, as well as its pleasures. An acquaintance of mine, always intent upon what he calls "improving the occasion," on my making a casual complaint the other day of the cold winds in Spring, said with his usual solemnity of manner, "all earthly things have their reverse as well as their obverse side, and we cannot have the one without the other." Well, in regard to the matter of fact, no doubt his remark was true enough, but in regard to the need for his giving it oracular utterance, I was not so fully convinced. For my own part, I make bold to confess that I seldom find myself much the better for having been made the target of moral truisms by one who shuts his eyes while he fires them off at me. Somehow or other, I fancy I am not being dealt with in a complimentary way. The motive may be, and probably is, conscientious and kind, but the act seems to imply a rather low estimate of my own reflective powers. It bears a close resemblance to the habit some people have of underscoring every third or fourth word they

write, as if they couldn't trust to the intelligence of their readers, without rendering them some mechanical assistance, to measure the relative value of each word in a sentence. It would be almost as reasonable in them if, while conversing orally, they should accommodate their friends by spelling all the long words they use, and giving their dictionary meanings. The practice of intercalating into ordinary talk little bits of trite religious observation, not so much because they are wanted by the person to whom they are addressed, as because the person who is addressing him wants to get rid of them with a view to the satisfaction of his own conscience, is less likely to improve the former than to react upon the latter as a kind of soothing-syrup. But I am letting myself be run away with, and must therefore pull up abruptly; and, after all, I am by no means confident that some of my readers may not see reason to say to me, in reference to some of these papers, "Physician, heal thyself."

Nevertheless, these "wayside musings" would perhaps be too one-sided, without some further reference than has yet been made to the disagreeable things one may expect to encounter in a daily "constitutional." I am not going to enumerate them, more especially as they will differ in different districts of the country. At Cork, for instance, I was informed that out-of-door exercise could only be undertaken under one of two conditions—heavy rain, or clouds of dust—and certainly whilst I was there my experience cor-

roborated the information. Hereabouts we have a greater variety of annoyances, but then we have the advantage of being often free from all of them, and can the more uncomplainingly take the bad with the good. Still, annoyances there are, and among them one of the least endurable is "dusty roads."

Strange as it may seem, however, there are certain periods of the year when we anticipate dusty roads with a sort of longing eagerness. About the middle of February, and especially if the winter has been characterized by copious downfalls of snow and rain, the spongy condition of most country roads, and the sludge which covers the surface of even the best which are macadamized, give, by the force of contrast, a positive attraction to the opposite annoyance, when seen only in the far distance. The evils that are present with us are generally felt to be the worst with which we can be afflicted, and, in our anxiety to get rid of them, we are ready enough to receive in exchange for them those which as soon as they are fairly upon us force us to think that we have only jumped "out of the frying-pan" to fall "into the fire."

Why is it that everything in this world which we specially value should invariably bring with it a disagreeable appendix? Numerous and good roads belong to an advanced state of civilization, and lead us to infer, with moral certainty, frequency of social intercourse and increasing commercial activity. Why is it that we cannot have these unquestionable advantages without a

drawback proportioned to their magnitude? We can conceive of a state of things under other laws of nature than those which now regulate the disposition of matter, in which good roads, ready made to our feet, should be found wherever they are needed, and be wholly free from the grievous nuisance of dust, through all seasons, and under any amount of traffic. Why is the actual state of things so different from that which we like to imagine, and why, in the present state of being, is the ideal as to almost everything so far ahead of the existent? That it is so, everybody is made sensible. Everyone's road through life is, at times, a dusty one. The very hedgerows on either hand, which dress themselves in such delicate array as Spring advances, and the wild flowers which peep out from the banks on which they grow and sport their varied beauties and exhale their fragrance to the admiration and refreshment of every passenger, get soiled and choked with dust, and fall into a miserable helplessness quite pitiable to behold. The pleasures which line our way to the end of our course, even where they continue to live, very soon lose their freshness, and present to our desires their natural attractions all sullied by use and wont. The sprays and leaves that were at first so deliciously green, so suggestive of tenderness and purity, so apparently intent upon keeping dirt and disorder at a distance, how white and dry and dust-laden they too quickly become, needing to die down to the roots before they can recover their former loveliness! Why is

this ? It exhibits a law of life so universally applicable that we may be sure there is deep meaning in it. It is not the result of an unlucky chance that the roads we most need and oftenest use are, throughout the pleasantest seasons of our earthly being, most dusty. The phenomenon must be a significant one if we could only fairly interpret its significance.

Such questions as these often occur to me when I get a little out of temper with this particular kind of wayside persecution. I am naturally disposed to look for the bright lining of every cloud that envelopes me, but I must candidly admit that clouds of dust have gone far towards spoiling my optimism. Still there is an alleviating reflection, even under this trial of one's patience, which should not altogether be overlooked—namely, that dust is inevitable on *roads* only—on the line of passage from one spot to another—and that we can shut it out from *home*. It belongs far more to the business than to the quiet enjoyments of life. It is not in the fields, it does not penetrate far into the woods ; into the former of which we wander for invigoration, and into the latter of which we retreat for silent and reverent meditation. It is chiefly in the ways along which we drive our traffic, our merchandise, our articles and materials for the acquisition of gain, that we are smothered with innumerable particles of this earthly soil, and that every step we take puffs a new volume of them into aptitude and power to annoy us. And where the traffic is greatest and most uninterrupted, the dust

is most abundant. Where men most congregate together for trade and manufacture, all the approaches to their centres of activity—and they are necessarily more numerous there than in other places—are most liable to this polluting disturbance. The cares which settle upon us, which rob of its beauty and freshness the very attire of our souls, and which choke our best aspirations, trouble us chiefly in the highways of our secular occupation, and suggest to us that they connect themselves mainly with that sphere through which it may be our duty to pass, but in which it is not necessarily our duty to dwell. Few of us spend our whole lives on the road, and those who do, seldom do so to good purpose. Business is not everything, and the man who makes it everything soon shows in his exterior bearing not only where he has been, but where he has not ; for it is easy to infer from the state of his sympathies, his affections, and his whole emotional nature, to say nothing of his habits, that he resorts to no alternation of thought or feeling to brush away the dust which settles in thick layers upon his soul.

This thought naturally conducts us to another, namely, that we should all of us establish a retreat from the dusty ways of life, and frequent it, partly to relieve and recruit ourselves, partly to cleanse ourselves from daily stains. I might, and that, I think, without impropriety, enlarge upon the immense advantage, even in connection only with the enjoyment of time, accruing from stated converse with the objects that address

themselves to our spiritual nature, the frequent application of which, like water to the body, washes away the pollutions which, when left unheeded, soon check all the functions, and impede the development, of the inner and inextinguishable life. But this is a lesson on which I refrain from dwelling, the rather because, in one shape or other, it is inculcated upon most of us every week. I leave it, therefore, to those who specially consecrate their energies to this end. It is worthy of remark, however, that there are lodges—I may not call them homes—into which it is wise periodically to retire from the dust and turmoil of the world's great thoroughfare, wherein we may brush away some of the deposit which, undisturbed, stuffs up all the pores through which the life within us should breathe out what is extraneous to it, and repel from its citadel the invisible forces of decay and death. They who value their health, and would maintain an equable cheerfulness of spirit, cannot do better than set up for themselves some pursuit which will periodically withdraw them from the "dusty roads" of business—reading, composition, verse-making, drawing, music, horticulture—or, where there are wives and families, any of the domesticities by which they can increase their pleasures, draw out their affections, or give useful activity to their minds. If they are only as true to their recreations as they are to their counting-houses, and if, especially, they select their recreations to exercise heart rather than head, their home engagements will be to them as draughts of pure spring water

are to the parched and exhausted traveller, or as the washing of the feet in Eastern climes, which is regarded as the first duty of polite hospitality. Alternations of employment of some sort there must be, if a man would keep his spirits fresh and healthful, and he who grows indifferent to all change of pursuit is more to be pitied than the tramp who knows not the luxury of daily ablutions.

No doubt it is possible to lay the dust on our most frequented roads, and in the neighbourhood of towns this is more or less effectually attempted. It is done by public arrangement only, and needs frequent repetition to make a resort to it worth while. We have not yet reached that advanced stage of civilization which will admit of an analogous expedient in our method of transacting business. I sometimes wonder whether we ever shall. Will society, commercial society more particularly, ever acquire that perfection of organization which will liberate from all unnecessary, because avoidable, cares the great majority of those who earn their subsistence or derive their wealth from manufacturing or trading occupations? A slight approach to this "consummation devoutly to be wished" has been already made—a very slight one, it is true. We are gradually abridging the hours of business—we take a few more holidays than we used to do. Still, it must be confessed that even these alleviations leave the roads of daily toil exceedingly dusty. The worries of trading life arise very mainly from what

may be characterized as the looseness of the soil along which it travels. Lax morality has become so prevalent, that they who frequent the road of which it constitutes the basis must needs be enveloped in clouds of dust, and unconsciously inhale some of it into their system. O for a watering-cart fit for the exigency ! Would that some process were discovered by means of which the interchange of commodities from hand to hand might be effected universally without raising up on every side a polluting atmosphere ! I imagine the *desideratum* may be realized at some distant day in the future ; meanwhile, let every man do his utmost to lay the dust before his own door.

It may be retorted by men of business that the inconvenience, discomforts, and soils to which they are exposed in their several lines of occupation, are not at all peculiar to them ; that there is dust enough, not only along the highways of trade, but in the cross-roads and by-ways of pleasure ; and that they who go out for mere diversion are quite as liable to encounter clouds of comminuted dirt, and get themselves into a grimy condition, as their more industrious neighbours. That is quite true. Indeed, if the whole truth were told, I am not sure that the wayfarers for amusement do not get the worst of it. I frankly confess that my sentiment of self-complacency has been highly vexed at times by the state of my boots and nether garments when, after a long walk on a dusty road, I have had to pass through some spruce, natty, busy little town in

which all the streets have been carefully watered, and all the inhabitants seem to have preserved their normal trimness of attire. It is not a little galling to one's vanity to present such a conspicuous contrast to all that is around him. Besides the misery of having a soiled skin, and of being most unpleasantly conscious of an accumulation of pulverized grit in his eyes, nostrils, and mouth, he is tortured by the notice which every one he meets takes of his feet, and by his own suspicion that he may be mistaken for a vagrant. It is very humiliating, and it can't well be helped. No, a man has no right to expect exemption from dust any more in the pursuit of pleasure than of gain, and, in the first case, perhaps, the nuisance is more perceptible both to himself and others than in the last. For it is certainly more discreditable to a man's character to exhibit unmistakable signs of having given himself very largely to the recreations than to the business of life. To be for ever on the road in quest of the one is really more besmirching to the mind than in prosecution of the other. Few things are more unseemly and repulsive than the evidence occasionally brought under your observation that such-and-such-an-one's thoughts and sympathies are wholly engrossed by frivolous pastimes, even when they are such as exercise the manlier powers. Hunting, shooting, fishing—billiards, bagatelle, chess—concerts, theatres, balls—when these in turn fill up pretty nearly the entire space of a man's waking existence, they so completely choke his higher

nature, overlay his discourse, and stifle his sense of responsibility to society, that he deservedly loses position, and evermore carries about with him a gnawing self-dissatisfaction. Making recreation our main business is a fearful mistake, whether in men or women. Yet how many there are who live for no other purpose than that of amusing themselves ! Nothing is suffered to interfere with their arrangements for this object. Half their days, and, perhaps, half their nights, are given to this pursuit of pleasure, and a considerable proportion of the remaining moiety is either spent in preparation for, or absorbed in recovery from, their recreative engagements. It is a sad and sorry employment of the faculties which God has given us, however innocent in itself may be the recreation indulged in. It may be said of all modes by which jaded nature may be recruited, that they were made for man, and not man for them. If all our time be thus spent, it may be safely assumed that, for the most part, it is misspent. We were born to higher ends than any which can be written down in the schedule of diversions. Our own higher destination craves some care ; our families, our neighbourhood, our country, the world, and, above all, He who made both us and them, demand some share of our thoughts, our anxieties, our exertions. We cannot evade their responsibility without incurring a heavy penalty. We may live to please ourselves, but, in the end, we shall not be pleased. The circle of our sympathies will contract. The spring of our minds will



become less and less elastic. Selfishness will close up one after another the inlets to the soul ; and, by-and-by, we shall be devoured with *ennui*, and hopelessly groan out the question, " Who will show us any good ? "

Life on the road has its termination—life beyond it will be free from dust. Petty vexations that fill the atmosphere of our present state of being seem to be appropriate to it, and to it alone. They are decidedly unpleasant, but they subject us to a useful discipline, and increase our longings for some purer and more translucent sphere. The only remedy on this side the grave, for those who desire a remedy, is periodical retirement and frequent washings—beyond it, we may look for "green pastures" and "still waters" in a region where "dusty roads" will be unknown.



XVIII.

VEILING UNSIGHTLINESS.

I RETAIN, as if it were but yesterday, my remembrance of that morning, as I retain, also, my sense of indebtedness to H——, whose watchful and delicate friendship—one of the blessings which I cherish as a hidden treasure—was the principal means of making it a red-letter day in my experience. Among those of my readers who have reached the grand climacteric—if I may venture to presume that these pages will be honoured with such—there will not be many, I imagine, who do not know what it is to have had the backbone of a hope which has been assiduously nurtured for many a long year, and which has grown up to the very verge of realization, suddenly and most unexpectedly broken. Those of them who have passed through this special form of disciplinary trial, will be aware how the mind, after it has got over the stupor occasioned by the attendant shock, is conscious of that sorely bruised state of the feelings which indisposes it to motion of any kind, and in which an utter weariness overspreads, and seems to take final possession of, its powers and susceptibilities. Its elasticity appears to be gone for ever.

It broods. It moans. It surrenders itself to listlessness through the day, to sorrowful ruminations through the night. With the object which has been wrenched from it, and which filled so wide a space in its everyday thoughts and cares and emotions, its interest in all other things seems to have gone also. It asks only to be let alone, and finds a morbid satisfaction in gazing on the ruin of that edifice which its own energies and expectations had been busily engaged in rearing for itself.

Something like this had been my mental condition for a longer time than I care to confess, when H——, who was well aware of how matters stood with me, proposed that I should accompany him in a three or four days' trip to the Isle of Wight, and would listen to no refusal. We were whirled along the direct line to Portsmouth in little more than a couple of hours; we crossed in the passage-boat to Ryde in the next half-hour, and immediately set off on foot to Shanklin. The evening was a charming one, about the middle of May, and Nature was in her freshest and most maidenly attire. At other times, when I have passed over the same ground with the same friend, the well-known and well-loved scenery, the carolling birds, the pure air, the exercise of walking, and the blithe humour of my companion, always expanded my spirits into buoyancy. They failed of doing so now. My attention was only momentarily attracted by the outer loveliness through which we wended our way, and instantly reverted to

the inner desolation which had already too long absorbed it. With the practical insight of genuine sympathy, H—— gently stole into the presence of my sorrow, and with tender words chafed and soothed it. He looked down with me into the chasm which had been created by what I then regarded as a supreme disaster, and kindly pointed out to me some of its alleviations. I must have taxed his forbearance very heavily, but he allowed no hint of impatience to escape him. However, the change, the bodily exertion, and sympathy delicately administered, did me good, although for the present I was not sensible of it, and I slept that night more composedly than I had done for many foregoing ones.

We went over next morning to Ventnor by the foot-way along the edge of the cliff. Again the weather was all that could have been wished for. The apathy of my feelings had somewhat given way, and my mind opened, as it were, to receive the balmy influences which God in His works was shedding around us. The picturesque beauty of the neighbourhood of Shanklin is doubtless so familiar to many of my readers, and for those of them who have never seen it requires such masterly word-painting to do it justice, that I shall not attempt even a sketch of it. The celebrated landslip—as unique a gem of scenic loveliness as can be found in that island which can boast of many gems—lay in our route, nearly midway between Shanklin and Ventnor. I pass by the story of its formation—how in one



night a huge cantle of cliff, consisting of I am afraid to say how many acres, having been loosened probably by land-springs, frosts, and other disintegrating agencies, parted from the contiguous rock, and, sliding by its own weight down the slope skirting the sea, left a broad precipitous scarp behind it, and broke up into a vast area of gigantic fragments heaped together in sublime irregularity and confusion. One can imagine what must have been the grim desolation disclosed to the eye when the next day dawned upon the spot—raw, bare, dislocated, ruinous. Since that event, pitying Nature, assisted here and there, possibly, by tasteful Art, has been lovingly employed in veiling the unsightliness of the scene, fringing the brow of the rock with overhanging vegetation, studding its breast with small ledges of briar, brushwood, and saplings, softening the ruggedness of the splintered masses beneath with moss and lichen, and filling in the broken ground with ferns and underwood and all sorts of trees ; in fine, clothing the site of the catastrophe with exquisite beauty. I will not trouble my readers with any description of the feelings it excited in my bosom on that morning—for I had often seen it before—further than to remark that the picture wonderfully harmonized with what had passed in my recent experience, and instantly suggested the topic of my present observations.

For Nature everywhere and at all times seems intent on healing wounds, concealing scars, veiling unsightliness. There is hardly a ruined castle, the bare walls

of which, if they stand long enough, she does not cover and adorn with a mantle of ivy. There is scarcely a quarry, or gravel-pit, or even a brick-field which, when human labour has finally abandoned it, she will not, if left to her own sweet will, begin to beautify and render as picturesque as circumstances will allow. She hangs her garlands of parasitical plants about the trunks of decaying trees. She spreads over railway embankments and all manner of earthworks a carpet of verdure, often ornamenting them here and there with tufts of furze and broom, and sprinkling them with wild flowers. She tones down as speedily as may be all rawness of surface, and delights in filling in interstices and blanks with objects grateful to the sight. Her charity is of the richest and most active kind. Her sympathies seek out the neglected, the forsaken, the fallen; and, within the limits assigned to her by the Creator's laws, she is ever active where her beneficent activities are most needed.

The lesson is an instructive and impressive one for all who will study it, and perhaps there are none who do not need to study it. We veil our own unsightlinesses with more or less success, but always with goodwill. We are less careful to cover over the unsightlinesses of our fellows. Not too many examples of the spirit which pervades the material world are to be met with in social life, but those illustrations which do come before us are touching in their moral loveliness.

I understand the Apostle to be setting forth a broad

principle, as broad principles are usually and most conveniently set forth, namely, without any of its necessary qualifications and limitations, when he says, "Charity shall cover the multitude of sins." Possibly, he was quoting a well-known proverb, and used it, as we all use proverbs, merely to enforce attention to the particular aspect of duty then under his special consideration. The meaning seems to be that, in social life, love will rather hide than expose what is amiss in other people. Such is its characteristic impulse, although, of course, its impulses are subject to regulation by the conjoint decision of the full council of the human powers, interpreting the mind of the Supreme Ruler as expressed in law. The most disinterested love will not always throw a veil over offences, for it may chance that the act would merely favour one man at the expense of many ; but where it may be done without disregarding other and imperative obligations, love will do it. There are traits of character, and direct or incidental manifestations of them, in people with whom we are brought into association, which it would do society no good to uncover, but the revelation of which would be crushing to the persons who are answerable for them. There may be frailties against which a man may be often struggling, but by which he is also often overpowered. There may be grievous deficiencies which never can be fully repaired, nor, in some cases, wholly concealed. These, and such as these, genuine love, following the example of kindly Nature, will rejoice to screen from

general observation, by attracting regard to what is estimable, and interposing to the view of others the virtues behind which such faults may lie unnoticed, even where they cannot be entirely hidden. One is not called upon to tear down the ivy which causes the unsightliness of bare and blackened walls, but rather, if it may be done without a violation of a higher duty, to tend and train it. We may be as unsparing as we will towards ourselves; but, considering our own infirmities, and bearing in mind that there may be always beneath those of others something that escapes our penetration, which, if made known to us, would qualify our judgment, we can seldom look upon the infirmities of our fellows in too compassionate or merciful a temper. Wherever circumstances permit, it behoves us to hide, and, if possible, beautify the uncomeliness which we cannot alter.

But it is rather to what men suffer than to what they are, to their lot than to their character, that the analogy applies. And in this respect I am happy to think that Nature—by which I mean the laws which God has ordained for the government of His works—prompts and impels towards like results both the intelligent and the merely material creation. Of both, there are conditions which render her efforts fruitless. There are bogs and deserts the unsightliness of which cannot be veiled. There are modes of thought, and social usages, and depths of moral degradation, which so completely suppress natural tendencies in men as to

raise a doubt in many minds whether such tendencies ever had a being in them. But, passing by these obvious exceptions, one may observe, I think, in communities of men the constant operation of a law disposing them to lend some sort of culture to wastes, to repair accidents, to mitigate inevitable calamities, to shield misfortune from its own worst consequences, and to throw over the ills of life an appearance which shall partly correct and partly conceal them.

I have noticed this especially among the poor. There is much that is unsightly—I speak not now of physical phenomena—necessarily and almost constantly exposed to their view. With scenes of misery, with many varieties of suffering, with sudden and overwhelming misfortune, their condition of life renders them more familiar than other classes. As, however, they have not been in the habit of suppressing their sympathies, and are under fewer temptations than those high above them to feed their selfishness to the entire neglect of their fellow-feeling, they exhibit to a close observer a wonderful amount of commiseration in regard to those who specially need it. Commonly, they evince a stronger disposition to screen even moral pollution from the sight than to draw attention to it, and to plead extenuations for characters and deeds which they cannot but condemn than to place them in an exaggerated light. But when the misery of others sinks far below the level of their own, or abject want tortures its victim in the limited neighbourhood within which their

interest is confined, or the cry of distress is sudden and piercing, then kindly impulses, and pitying thoughts, and purposes of self-sacrifice, and acts of considerate, nay, delicate attention, move from many quarters, towards the scene of woe, and instantly begin, and, as long as necessity requires, continue, to make the mischief more endurable, and deprive it of its most hideous features, and cause the sufferer of it to smile in response to so unusual a display of sympathy. I would not be understood to insinuate that such manifestations occur *only* among the poor—as I shall presently show—but it is undeniable that, inasmuch as misfortunes of almost every kind, and especially of the worst kind, come more frequently within range of their notice, so, among them, illustrations of the impulsive eagerness of the human heart to alleviate where it can, and to beautify if it could, great disasters, are more visible and more frequent than in the securer and less troubled regions of society.

In this country, however, where refracted Christianity has done so much to soften the ruggedness of human passion, to awaken kindness of disposition, and to elevate character in every rank of life, almost every class can supply appropriate exemplifications of the benign tendency of which I am speaking. It is not altogether unknown even in the field of commercial competition, where, amid the general clash of opposing interests, the struggle of every man to hold his own, tends to repress the gentle impulses, and to scare pity

into its hiding-place in the heart. Although consideration for others is not very freely exhibited in the heat of strife for a subsistence, and the harder and sterner features of character show themselves most conspicuously in the daily *mêlée*, yet even there it is not, by any means, an unheard-of thing for men to turn aside and cast a mantle over the mangled reputation of a fallen antagonist, or give cold water to the hapless and helpless wounded, the life-blood of whose prosperity is visibly ebbing away. But off the field where the lust of gain predominates, and restored to the scenes in which the kindlier influences come into play, the most imperious, sometimes the most exacting and inexorable, men of business are quite open to the appeals of suffering humanity, and as ready as any to relieve it. Society, as such, although, it must be confessed, somewhat disinclined to the practice of systematic beneficence, is not wholly insensible to its responsibilities. Where calamity is sudden and striking, or ruin is extensive and appalling, it is cheering to witness the spontaneous rush of liberality, and, what is even better, true pity towards the scene of disaster. No one will be likely to forget—for I select the most recent and memorable illustration—the magnificent outburst of national sympathy which was evoked by the cotton famine, and the innumerable agencies which it instantly brought into existence and kept in prolonged activity to repair the devastations of that vast catastrophe. From informa-

tion I have received, I believe that even that sublime display of what may be called the *vis medicatrix* of society, is equalled, if not surpassed, by the hardly less general, but much more skilfully organized, efforts of the population of the Northern States of America to mitigate the fearful havoc occasioned by the Civil War, to supply comforts for the troops, to minister help and solace to the wounded, to care for the widow and orphan, to do all that active sympathy can do towards dispersing the horrors of the present day of judgment for the Republic. Pretty nearly every family in the North, I have been told, takes a daily share of the work and the self-sacrifice required for these compassionate ends, and, in an immense number of households, the first study of every day throughout the last three years has been what shall be done towards lessening the suffering attendant upon the awful strife which convulses the Union.

But the activity of this impulse to diminish misfortune, and, if possible, turn it into a blessing, is not restricted to any extraordinary emergencies. It percolates—often scantily, it is true—through all the strata of social life. It is, perhaps, least equably diffused in great cities, and yet it is in great cities that it wells up to the surface in amplest volumes. Of course whenever, as for instance, in the metropolis, individuality is merged, and there is no social law as yet developed to arrange in something like organic order the huge aggregate of almost isolated atoms, the precious

remedial element is, to a considerable extent, latent only, because cut off from the misery which it would naturally tend to alleviate, by the obscurity in which that misery, in most instances, is shrouded from observation. In London, as is too well known, the direst wretchedness may, on account of its very intensity, be shivering in despair and courting death within a stone's throw of affluence and genuine kindness, and yet the one may be as effectually walled off from the other as if a rock of adamant intervened between them. Within the last few years, however—and let us be thankful for the change—a great variety of philanthropic and Christian machinery has been employed to open ways of communication between the one and the other, so as that wherever the one exists the other shall at least be cognizant of it, and operate upon it. The case is deplorable enough even now, and the constantly increasing evil seems to outstrip the means resorted to for the purpose of arresting and subduing it; nevertheless, the sum total of efforts daily made to lessen physical distress, and to close the sluices of moral pollution, is only less known and less calculable than the sum total of the woes they aim to lighten and remove. It is a significant and highly encouraging fact that even in the least promising and seemingly most unmanageable haunts of ignorance, want, misfortune, and vice, and still more in those districts which are more open to ameliorative influences, whatever is divine in the human heart incessantly strives to get the upper hand of what-

ever is evil in human character and circumstances ; and innumerable incidents are revealing to us the truth that God, in manifold ways, is working through Providential law, and by means of human feeling and effort, natural and spiritual, to reduce chaos to order, to put an end to confusion and unsightliness, and to shed over the scene of the greatest moral catastrophe a glory of spiritual peace, joy, and loveliness.

Every thing around us, every phenomenon which addresses our attention, every ordination which the Creator has impressed upon His works, material and mental, all history from the period of its dawn until now, concurs with the utterances of that Revelation of which Christ is the centre, in teaching us that the dispensation through which this world is slowly passing is essentially remedial in its scope and tendencies. The law of progress, of amelioration, of reparation, marks out its orbit. Amid many fluctuations, the tide of good steadily advances upon the wastes of evil. Life gains upon death, fertility upon barrenness, knowledge upon ignorance, civilization upon brutality, virtue upon vice, religion upon irreligiousness. The movement of the race, considered as a whole, is upward. Every stage of a thousand years carries it nearer to the light, and leaves behind it for ever the rudest and grimmest horrors of its condition. Its destiny, plainly, is not left to chance. Underlying all that is misshapen, all dislocations, all discordant elements, all afflictive manifestations, one can yet discern the putting forth of a living

energy, irresistible as that of gravitation, in virtue of which the entire system, in its symmetry, beauty, and splendour, shall one day give back to Heaven what it has thence received. The unsightliness shall disappear, and in place of it shall surely be "new heavens and a new earth" over which "the morning stars shall sing together, and all the sons of God shall shout for joy."

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